THE WALKING DEAD ON SET EXCLUSIVE!



SFX

271

What *has* happened to *Jon Snow*?

GAME of THRONES

FACTS! RUMOURS! MYSTERIES!
The need-to-know on season six

PLUS!



DEADPOOL
The X-Men universe just got ruder



DIVERGENT 3
Behind the scenes with the stars of Allegiant



RICHARD DONNER
The Superman director on his sci-fi classics

Also in your packed issue

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE ▸ STAR WARS: ROGUE ONE
STEPHEN KING'S 11.22.63 ▸ SCI-FI RESTAURANTS ▸ STARCRASH
DC'S LEGENDS OF TOMORROW ▸ HIGH-RISE ▸ THE ALIENS ▸ MORE!

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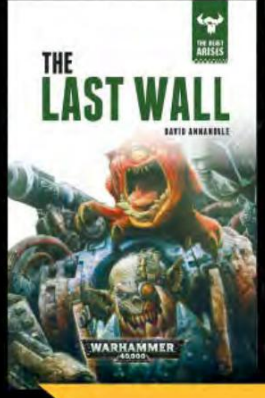
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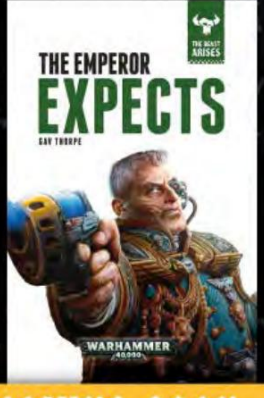


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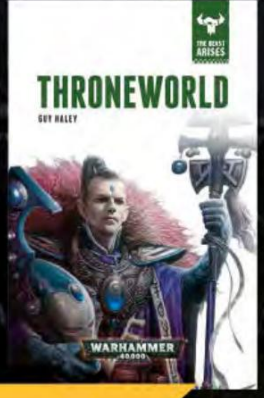
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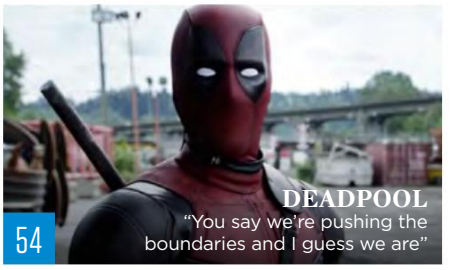
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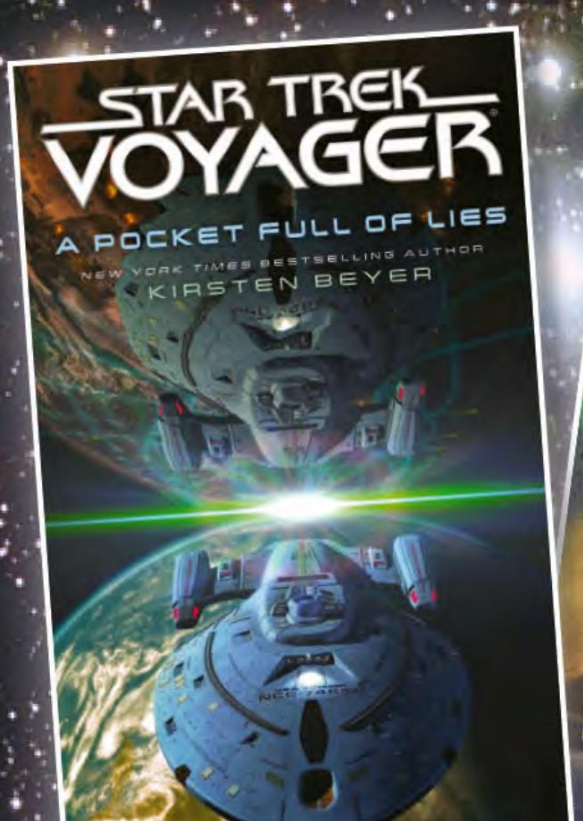
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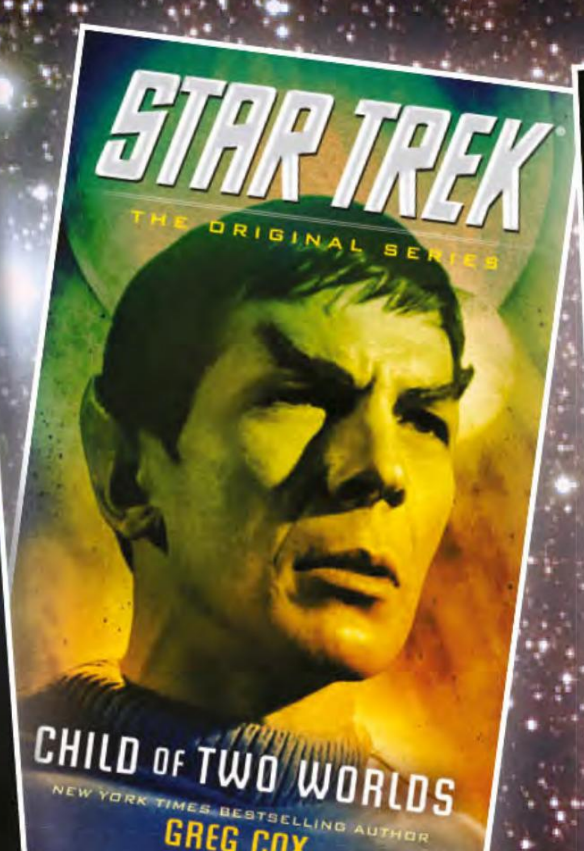
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The Twilight Zone's Rod Serling is still looking dapper.

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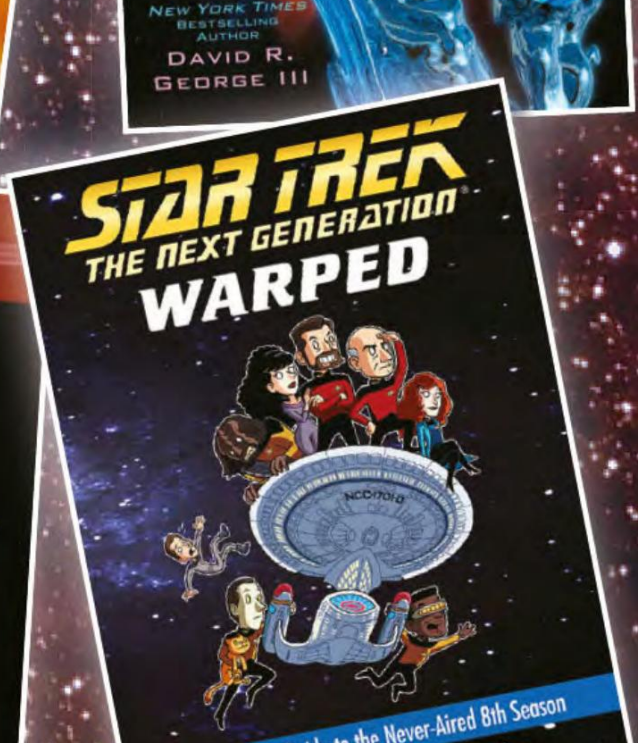
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The Ed Zone

Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE *SFX* HIVE MIND

RICHARD EDWARDS
EDITOR



RAVES

→ Just caught up on the second season of *Les Revenants*, and it was just as mysterious as I'd expected. But who needs definitive answers when a show is so stylish? A brilliant series.

→ My mum found all my old *Star Wars* figures in the loft, and it was like being reunited with old friends. Thanks, Mum! And hello again, Pruneface!

NICK SETCHFIELD
FEATURES EDITOR



RAVES

→ Devoured *The Man With The Golden Typewriter*, a collection of Ian Fleming's Bond letters. Witty, waspish and surprisingly vulnerable.

RIP

→ David Bowie. My hero. The man who made it okay to come from Mars. My tribute: http://bit.ly/sfxbowie.

IAN BERRIMAN
REVIEWS EDITOR



RAVES

→ Quite excited about this *Cloverfield* sequel JJ's suddenly sprung on us.

→ Delighted that a TV series of the website *Scarfolk* is now in development.

RANTS

→ It's not a great surprise, but I'm really narked that *Jekyll & Hyde* didn't get a second series.

WILL SALMON
ACTING NEWS EDITOR



RAVES

→ For the next few months I am the New Jordan, and have inherited his drawers full of Lego, ET figures and *True Blood* promotional tat.

→ *Episode VII* was wonderful. I want *Rogue One* right now!

RIP

→ Gutted about David Bowie. My hero since I was a kid.

RUSSELL LEWIN
PRODUCTION EDITOR



RAVES

→ For the first time since *The Truman Show* in 1998, I saw a film twice in the cinema – *The Force Awakens*. So yeah, I liked it.

RANTS

→ But there was nothing in it that should have prevented it being a PG. Do the BBFC not realise kids like a scare? Why do they get so many ratings wrong?

JONATHAN COATES
ART EDITOR



RAVES

→ Rewatched the first series of *Life On Mars* as my own little tribute to the fabulous Mr Bowie. Such an incredible series which I can't believe is 10 years old already!

→ Phew! *The Force Awakens* was actually pretty awesome. Mark Hamill stole the show with one look. Or maybe that was just a Jedi mind trick!

CATHERINE KIRKPATRICK
DEPUTY ART EDITOR



RAVES

→ Pleased the hype was jusified for *The Force Awakens*. Especially loved the duo of Finn and Rey.

→ *Jessica Jones* is being renewed for a second season. Damned good idea, Netflix!

RIP

→ Bowie and Alan Rickman. A sad farewell to two artistic greats.

ADRIAN HILL
AD MANAGER



RAVES

→ Really looking forward to the next instalment of *The Walking Dead*. In the comics the character of Negan is a real monster, so I'm keen to see how he is on screen.

→ I recently picked up a *Six Million Dollar Man* box set. I'd forgotten just how enjoyable that series was. Let's hope the film remake stays true to it.

ALEX COX
OPERATIONS EDITOR, TF



RAVES

→ I bought an Xbox One just for *Fallout 4*. Or, as it turns out, I bought an Xbox One in order to wilfully ignore my family in favour of rooting around in apocalyptic bins for tin cans. I'm not very popular at home.

RANTS

→ That Doctorless void at the beginning of the year just aches.

SARAH DOBBS
WRITER



RAVES

→ The trailer for *The Conjuring 2* was terrifying. James Wan knows his way around a good scare.

RANTS

→ In theory, it's cool that Netflix is making *Shadowhunters* available in the UK as it airs in the US, but the first episode was so shaky and bone-headed I almost wish they hadn't bothered.

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Few shows create more debate than *Game Of Thrones*. It's the very definition of water-cooler telly, with almost every episode leaving you gasping to speak to someone – anyone! – about what you've just seen. Sometimes you need the therapy.

The upcoming sixth season is particularly intriguing because, for the first time, we have no blueprint for where the story's going. With *The Winds Of Winter*, George RR Martin's latest *A Song Of Ice And Fire* novel, still not finished, the TV series is about to overtake the source material. And after a cliffhanger that's left us pondering Jon Snow's fate for nearly a year we're desperate for answers. The closest thing the show has to a hero can't be dead... Can he?

In anticipation of the show's return, we've pored through the novels and hunted down every clue we can, to bring you up to speed on what to expect when season six hits in April. Turn to p46 for your essential Seven Kingdoms intel.

Beyond Westeros, we've flown out to the US state of Georgia to visit the set of another show with little regard for its characters' safety, *The Walking Dead* (p68), and to meet the cast of the latest instalment of *The Divergent Series, Allegiant* (p80). There's also fourth-wall-busting superhero Deadpool (p54) and loads more in the latest issue of the world's number one sci-fi magazine. Why not make sure you never miss an issue by subscribing? Find out how on p30.



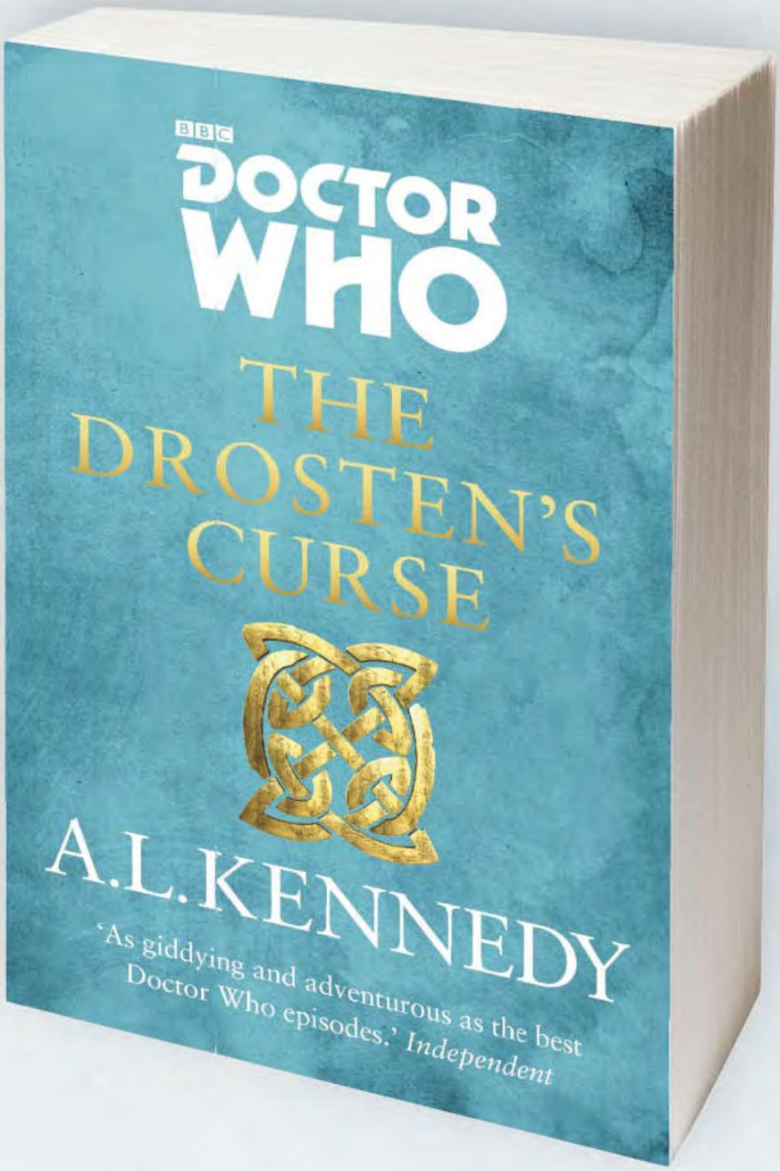
See me on page 54

Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

RICH'S PICTURE BY OLLY CURTIS

Something huge, ancient and alien lies hidden beneath the ground



– and it's starting to wake up...

Waterstone's

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THE FUTURE FIRST!

Red Alert

APRIL 2016

→ NEWS //// INTERVIEWS //// INSIGHT //// DAVROS! → *edited by Will Salmon*



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE!

PAST IMPERFECT

Stephen King's JFK thriller tries to right one of history's wrongs *11.22.63*

Stephen King has scared the heebie-jeebies out of millions of readers for over 40 years and is still going strong. However, the Master of Horror took a detour into SF territory with *11.22.63*. The novel finds time traveller Jake Epping on a mission to stop Lee Harvey Oswald from assassinating President John F Kennedy. What Jake doesn't realise, however, is the devastating ripple effect his mission might have on the future. Now, Hulu has turned King's thriller into *11.22.63*, a nine-episode TV series. →

Highlights



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→ Tom Hiddleston lives it up in Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise*.



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→ William Brent Bell tells us about new devil dummy flick, *The Boy*.



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IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT
→ How *Midnight Special* is a sci-fi manhunt with a retro twist.

SCI-FACT! **Director Jonathan Demme was originally attached to produce the show, but departed over alleged disagreements with King.**

> "It has this scale of Homeric Odyssey, but the main character is a teacher"

"I had read the book before Bad Robot asked if I wanted to come in and talk about how I might adapt this," explains executive producer Bridget Carpenter. "I knew the book and how incredibly epic it was. It's such a great journey. It does have this scale of Homeric Odyssey, but the main character is a teacher.

"You have a very Stephen King universe, where you can step into a closet and fall back to 1960," Carpenter continues. "There are spooky elements, but it's grounded. There are characters that you know and recognise and that you fall in love with. There's a depth of character, and a lot going on."

Anybody familiar with King's body of work will know that his sagas tend to begin and end with conflicted characters. In *11.22.63*, English teacher Jake Epping's (James Franco) life is in a rut before he stumbles across a portal that can transport him back to the '60s.

"We find Jake at a road in his life and he doesn't know where he is on it," says Carpenter. "He just signed some divorce papers with his wife. He's a devoted teacher, but his students are listless. An adult education student that he cares about asks him to write a recommendation so he can be a head janitor. Jake can't even get that to happen. He's sort of wondering what his life is about. At that moment in time, his closest friend, Al Templeton (Chris Cooper), shows him a closet in Al's diner that when you walk into it, inexplicably brings you back into the past."

RULES OF THE ROAD

The "rules" of time travel vary from author to author, but most agree that the past cannot be changed without potentially screwing up the future. King also put his own unique spin on the mechanics of leaping backwards in time.

"King's rules are very simple," offers Carpenter. "Once you go through the time portal, which happens to be a pantry closet at the diner, every day you get there it's 23 October 1960. No matter how long you stay, time passes there as it normally does. And, whether you stay two minutes or two weeks or two years, if you go back through the rabbit hole, only two minutes has passed in the present day.

"The third rule is if you return through the rabbit hole, once again it's like you have reset the world," adds Carpenter. "It's October 1960 again. None of the stuff you did has happened. There's a *Groundhog Day* aspect to it. It's a new day. Nothing you have done has had any consequences. So, if you want your action to have permanent consequences, you cannot return through the rabbit hole."



If you travel back to the '60s, you *have* to get one of those hats. It's a rule.

11.22.63 features Franco, a busy actor usually associated with films rather than television. As it turns out, he was interested in the material at a very early stage.

"James had tried to option the book himself," explains Carpenter. "He wanted to direct it. Certainly, he loved the story. Then, he found out JJ Abrams had optioned it. Then, he tweeted something like, 'Oh, man. Some guys get all the fun.' We saw that tweet and we were like, 'JJ, call him.' They started talking. Then, he and I met. He jumped in. What appealed to him was he loved the idea of playing an everyman. Jake is a fellow who had quiet hopes and dreams, but then is called upon to do something possibly extraordinary."

There's a high cost to saving the President from Oswald (Daniel Webber), and Jake faces many twists, turns and conundrums along the way. In addition, compelling science fiction often provides a canvas for larger themes, and *11.22.63* is no exception.

"There are two messages to this story," concludes Carpenter. "I know that Stephen King believes this, which is 'Love is stronger than hate.' And, I believe that 'Actions have consequences.' For me, I really appreciated the considerable violence that was in this story. Not because it's gratuitous, but because it matters. There's no act of violence that didn't matter. What you do matters and I loved that."

11.22.63 airs on Hulu in the US from 15 February, with a UK airdate TBC.



That's why they're called the Swinging '60s.



"Look, the most important question here is: should I lose the beard?"



Franco originally hoped to option King's book himself before joining Abrams' version.

THE SMOKING GUN

Full disclosure on Stephen King's time travel mystery thriller

BOOK WORM

→ To portray Lee Harvey Oswald, Australian actor Daniel Webber devoured as much literature and material as he could about Kennedy's assassin. That included biographies on Oswald, his mother and wife, as well as perspectives from friends, psychologists and reporters who had written about him.

"One of the important aspects was developing his physicality, his mannerisms, speech and the particular look, which we spent a lot of time trying to get right," says Webber. "There are recordings of his voice and his physicality is archived. His diary also helped reveal his inner life."



Putting yourself in the mind of a killer...

PERIOD PIECE

→ To replicate the '60s, *11.22.63*'s production and costume designers slaved over every detail. Buildings in Toronto were transformed into various stores, homes and edifices from that era. Portions of the miniseries were also filmed on location in Dallas, Texas.

"The production has such a specific look and each character and set were so wonderfully thought out to make sure the audience and the actors always felt they were a part of the world," reflects Webber. "For example, we shot in certain locations to bring an authenticity, such as Dealey Plaza and Lee Harvey Oswald's actual home."

HIDDEN MESSAGES

→ *11.22.63* rekindles the fascination with the assassination of JFK, but it also delves into human nature. Webber agrees there are some bigger themes and issues explored.

"The story contains issues of race, love and obsession," notes Webber. "However, the thing that struck me was the idea that everyday things, moments and events – which we deem inconsequential – actually impact us and lead us to transform the trajectory of our lives. That, if even one event didn't line up exactly, perhaps we would not be where we are today. I guess it's a question of fate."

UNDER PRESSURE

→ There's always an immense pressure in bringing the words of an author as beloved as Stephen King's to life. "King's work is of such a high calibre, and has such a great standing in the world of literature and cinema, that you completely trust in the words given to you – the vision of the character and the story," says Webber.

SCI-FACT! Producer Jeremy Thomas was also executive producer on Cronenberg's adaptation of *Crash*.



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Ben Wheatley hits terrifying new heights with *High-Rise*...

For those unfamiliar with JG Ballard's 1975 novel, *High-Rise*, it's more than a little crazy. The inhabitants of a state-of-the-art London tower block engage in class warfare as failures in technology instigate an escalating orgy of destruction. Marauding battles occur in the corridors and stairwells; Dionysian parties last night and day in apartments; the mask of civility is stamped underfoot as primal urges are lustily satisfied.

Forty years in the making (even Nicolas Roeg couldn't crack a cinematic adaptation), a movie of *High-Rise* finally (dis)graces our screens courtesy of Brit director *du jour* Ben Wheatley (*Kill List*, *Sightseers*, *Doctor Who*), working from a script by his wife and regular scribe Amy Jump. Premiering at the Toronto Film Festival and then playing the London fest, Wheatley's uncompromising vision of a futuristic 1970s floored many, perplexed others.

"I think there was resistance because of the general idea of a received Hollywood kind of narrative," chuckles Wheatley. "When you push that to the edge, it becomes *Die Hard*. There's nothing wrong with that, but the idea that the protagonist must win at all costs and will defeat all the baddies along the way, like a videogame..." He sighs. "There's a version of *High-Rise* where Laing gets to the top of the tower and goes, 'I am the king of high-rise. Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker!' But [the book and the film] is a lot of going up and down the building but not really getting anywhere. Laing himself is a voyeur, like the audience; he doesn't ever really get involved. *That* is the story."

The aforementioned Laing is a doctor from the 25th floor. Voyeur or participant, he, like everyone else, undergoes a remarkable change across the course of the film. Wheatley describes Tom Hiddleston, the actor who portrays Laing, as a "consummate professional", pointing out that the film was shot out of order and yet his leading man had to remain "in control of Laing's collapse, and that's a bastard hard thing to do."

Hiddleston insists that Ballard's prose gives all the notes he could ever need. "It puts your head in a place," he says, then muses: "At what point do you accept your new primal animalistic truth, which is a warped – or simply more true – version of who you are? When does Dr Robert Laing – an elegant, sophisticated physiologist – become Laing: man, protector, loner, wolf?"

Shot in the abandoned Brutalist husk of Bangor Castle Leisure Centre in Northern Ireland, with the same few spaces redecorated again and again to create the illusion of the many interiors of a 40-storey superstructure, *High-Rise* manages to make its $6m budget stretch an awful long way. The film feels claustrophobic and self-contained, but the tower is remarkably convincing. Add a starry support cast that includes the likes of Luke Evans, Jeremy Irons, Sienna Miller, Elisabeth Moss, Reece Shearsmith, James Purefoy and Peter Ferdinando, and you have one of the must-see – if undoubtedly controversial – movies of 2016.

"Ballard's book still feels modern," says Wheatley. "In 20 years' time, it'll feel modern. He was writing the sci-fi of the internal, and I think that stuff will always be relevant."

High-Rise will be released on 18 March by StudioCanal.

Red Alert



He knew he should have gone for that nice semi-detached place in Croydon.

AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Lost **Star Trek** files by Gene Roddenberry have been discovered.
→ Surprising no one, Netflix's **Jessica Jones** has bagged a second season.
→ There are also rumours that a *Daredevil* spin-off, based on Jon Bernthal's **Punisher**, is being developed.
→ ITV's **Jekyll & Hyde** has sadly not been recommissioned.
→ Cult website (and book) **Scarfolk** is being developed as a TV show.
→ **Laura Dern** has joined the cast of the upcoming **Twin Peaks** revival.
→ X-Men TV show **Legion** will *not* crossover with the big-screen series – it takes place in a parallel universe.
→ **Game Of Thrones** may now run to eight seasons, not the previously stated seven.
→ **Peter Capaldi** says he hopes to cameo in upcoming Coal Hill spin-off, **Class**.
→ **Robot Wars** is coming back to the BBC! A six-episode new series will air later this year.

MY SCI-FI



Because famous people are fans too

DREW GODDARD

WRITER OF ***THE MARTIAN***
AND DIRECTOR OF
THE CABIN IN THE WOODS

Favourite SF/fantasy films
→ *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Blade Runner* stand out. I watch *Blade Runner* every six months or so, and still find out new things about it. And so much of my aesthetic has been influenced by *Empire*. There's this idea that the entire movie is just people telling characters to give up on their friends, and then those friends refusing to do so. I didn't notice that until recently. Then I realised, "Wait a minute, I've just described *The Martian* as well!"



Favourite SF/fantasy TV show
→ *The X-Files* came along when I was in college, and it was like a bomb went off for me. I remember where I was sitting when Darin Morgan's "Jose Chung's From Outer Space" aired. It was the first time I really made the connection that there's a unique writer's voice, and it was happening in this crazy, fearless show.



Favourite SF/fantasy book
→ I grew up on Douglas Adams – *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* was the biggest influence on me. Growing up in New Mexico everything feels foreign – there's nothing there except mountains and desert. So much of how I view the world in general came through books and movies, and *Hitchhiker's* felt very British. I think that was the appeal.

Guilty SF/fantasy pleasure
→ I wouldn't call it guilty because I really believe he is one of the best filmmakers of my life, but every John Carpenter movie. Even the ones I don't think are as heralded... There's just something about Carpenter's aesthetic I can't get enough of.

The Martian is out on Blu-ray and DVD from 8 February.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"I'M IN A BUSINESS WHERE THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS WEIGHT AND APPEARANCE. THAT'S SO MESSED UP. THEY MIGHT AS WELL SAY GET YOUNGER."

Carrie Fisher strikes back at Hollywood.



SCI-FACT! **Hardingham created a music playlist which the directors used to guide her on which emotion to play in each scene.**

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

NINA FOREVER

The Blaine Brothers discuss their gory and funny new ménage à trois...

IT WAS A LONG TIME COMING

1 *Nina Forever* is directed by the Blaine brothers, Ben and Chris – the award-winning siblings who were behind a host of comedy shorts, including 2006's *Hallo Panda*. The brothers' undead feature debut is about to land on DVD and Blu-ray, so the big question is: why did it take so long to make? "For ages we had this disconnect between our short comedies and our feature film scripts," explains Chris. "People would say, 'I really like your short, what is it you want to do as a feature?' 'Well, it's this really serious thing about the banking crisis...' They weren't necessarily biting!"

AFTER LAUGHTER COMES TEARS

2 Although it's being billed as a comedy, *Nina Forever* deals with some weighty subjects – notably grief and depression. The film sees Rob (Cian Barry), a supermarket drone, begin dating co-worker Holly (Abigail Hardingham). This is a big deal, given Rob lost his previous girlfriend Nina (Fiona O'Shaughnessy) in a car accident, and we're first introduced to him as he tries to commit suicide. The guy deserves a break, but every time he and Holly try to have sex, Nina's bloody, broken revenant appears in the bed, questioning what he thinks he's doing. "One of the things we like about the stuff we write is it's always a little strange," chuckles Ben. "So we really wanted to do something that was us."

THERE'S BLOOD AND SEX

3 With that description in mind, it's perhaps no surprise that the film features enough sex and gore to please even the keenest *Game Of Thrones* fan. "It was completely organic," says Ben. "Obviously you don't make a film in which beautiful people are naked and not think, 'Well, at least somebody's going to enjoy watching this!' But that wasn't why that happened."

IT'S BEEN A HIT ON THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

4 Influenced by films as diverse as *Let The Right One In* and *The Wrestler* – heightened relationship dramas set in humdrum environments – the gore is really just a visual metaphor for the characters' psychological messiness. Consequently, the Blaines were concerned about how it might be received by fandom. "We were worried about showing it to horror fans as it doesn't follow the rules," says Chris. "It's not about being scared." Despite that, the film went down a treat at festivals such as Fantasia in Montreal and FrightFest in London.

SHE'S DEAD AND (NOT) LOVING IT

5 "Nina isn't a monster," says Chris of the film's undead third wheel – "I'm *not* an ex," she stresses at one point, insisting that her death "doesn't mean we're on a break". It's a brilliant, star-making turn by Fiona O'Shaughnessy – previously best known for playing Jessica Hyde in *Utopia* – who manages to make Nina sympathetic despite being, well, a zombie. "She's often the opposition in a scene, but you never go, 'Oh god, here she comes...,' says Chris. "You're often on her side."

Nina Forever is out on DVD/Blu-ray on 22 Feb.



SCI-FACT! **Before becoming an acclaimed science fiction author, Simon Morden trained as a planetary geologist.**

AFTERLIFE
CELEBRATING ICONIC SCI-FI STARS

113

TERRY MOLLOY

Davros in Doctor Who



Despite having being portrayed by five actors over 40 years, *Doctor Who* villain Davros – creator of the Daleks – is synonymous with actor Terry Molloy. First breathing life into the hideously scarred, but intellectually superior, Kaled scientist in 1984's "Resurrection Of The Daleks", Molloy has continued to voice the character on stage and in audio dramas.

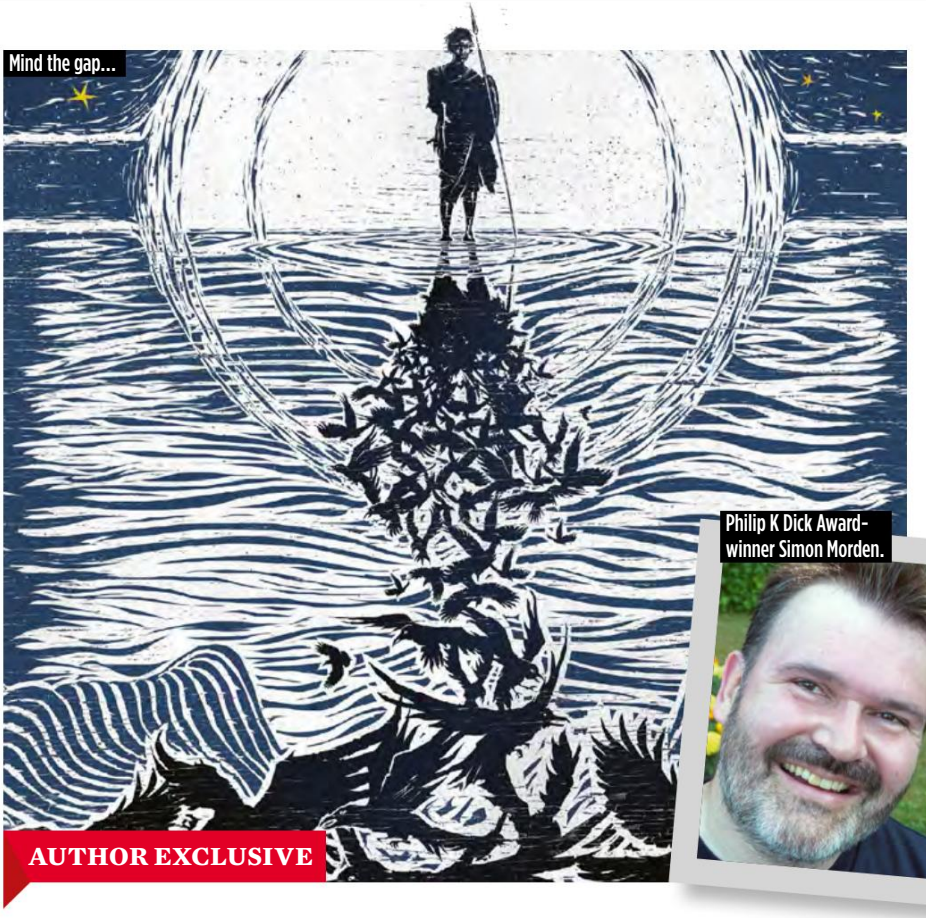
Would you play the role again on TV?
→ I'd love to. It's arduous, physically, but he's a character I love. He has a depth to him.

What's the strangest request you've had from a fan?
→ A fan in a cave girl costume came up and asked me to sign them – this fan was 26 stone and male with a beard!

Would any of Davros's attributes have been useful in real life?
→ The intellect and the ability to exterminate people is something I feel when I'm driving! I sympathise with Davros. When you look at "Revelation", he thinks he's solving starvation, but he's feeding people dead bodies! Morally that's not a problem for him.

Did you get any souvenirs from set?
→ I did have one of my fingers that were blown off in the series. Colin Baker got two of them and I gave one to charity. I plan to raid Colin's house sometime to get the others back!

What would it say on his gravestone?
→ There is only a new regeneration to come!



GOING UNDERGROUND

Simon Morden explains why he's taking the tube in *Down Station*...

"One of my favourite plot devices is the portal to another world," says Simon Morden, author of the *Metrozone* series. "Ordinary people find their knowledge, culture and sensibilities tested by their newly-alien surroundings. I love stories like that, but I've never tried to write one."

Down Station, Morden's latest, rectifies that. The first of a trilogy, it's the tale of a group of people who flee into the London Underground to escape a fiery apocalypse and find themselves transported to a magical world "that owes more to Solaris than Narnia".

But why the Underground? "It's a fantastic resource, but you have to acknowledge it's a weird-ass thing to go down some steps, be transported in a metal tube hundreds of feet below pavement level, only to walk up some steps a few minutes later and find yourself in a different place. That's what I was channelling.

"Down Street is one of the disused stations on the Piccadilly line," Morden continues. And Down, the magical realm his heroes enter, transforms people in unexpected ways. "They have to come to terms with wild, untameable magic where the person you choose to be is the person you ultimately become: for good or ill."

Volume two, *The White City*, is already coming on apace despite being written in difficult circumstances. "I wrote the first draft under the shadow of my father's death," Morden says. "I was concerned that the story would be too dark. However, the truth seemed to be that, just as Down gives gifts of unwanted magic to its inhabitants, I benefited from that too. There are extremes of light and dark, joy and pain, bravery and cowardice. Down lets you be the person you are, magnified."

Down Station is published on 18 February.

SCI-FACT! **William Brent Bell cites 1975 TV movie *Trilogy Of Terror* as key inspiration for *The Boy*.**



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

"Time for breakfast, dear."

(UN)LIVING DOLL

The Devil Inside director tells us about his new evil manikin movie, *The Boy*

Is there anything eerier than the glassy-eyed gaze of a doll? William Brent Bell, director of *The Boy,* doesn't think so. His new film tells the story of Greta, a young woman hired by a couple to look after their child, Brahms. Little does she know that Brahms is made of porcelain, not flesh...

"It's hard to find films that are unique," Bell tells Red Alert. "This particular script was. There were so many twists and surprises. And it's *really* scary."

Getting Brahms right was a time-consuming process. "It was definitely challenging. We took weeks to settle on things like his eyes, or the colour of his hair. When he can only sit there the way he looks is all-important. We ended up settling on something that looked very real."

Finding a Greta who could carry almost every scene of the movie was also crucial. Bell turned to *Walking Dead* survivor Lauren Cohan. "I wanted the character to be like a raw nerve and Lauren said, 'Raw nerve is my middle name!'" He's also quick to praise Cohan's commitment to the project. "In the morning she might be doing a scary scene, then after lunch a romantic scene with a guy. But she never faltered once. She never complained."

Although set in the UK, the producers plumped for Vancouver Island for the 24-day shoot, with a castle near Victoria providing the perfect setting for a film that Bell describes as a mix of the haunted house movie and *When A Stranger Calls*. "That film has my favourite 15 minutes of any horror. For this I tried to take that element and stretch it out for the whole movie – and then add this porcelain doll..." Might it be the start of a new franchise? "It certainly has that possibility. I hope so..."

The Boy opens on 19 February.

NEW AUTHOR

ADRIAN SELBY

THE EPIC FANTASY AUTHOR ON A DEBUT NOVEL THAT WAS 20 YEARS IN THE MAKING...

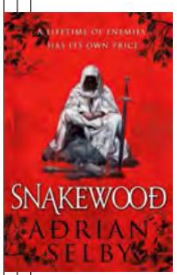


What is *Snakewood* about?
→ It's the story of Kailen's Twenty, a once legendary mercenary crew, who years later are being killed off one by one. It's written from multiple viewpoints, but most of it is told from the POV of one of the crew, Gant, as he tries to discover the identity of the killer.

Did it really take 20 years to write?
→ I had the idea 20 years ago, but it stayed in my head until about 10 years ago, when I decided that if I was going to call myself a writer I'd better crack on.

Is *Snakewood* the start of a series?
→ It's a one-off. However, while I was writing it, I saw another story emerge, using some of the same characters.

Did you do a lot of world-building?
→ Yes, and it took years. I was painfully aware how little knowledge I had of the era that typically grounds epic fantasy. I therefore read a bunch of history to provide a launchpad from which I'd blast off into my imagination. It stood me in good stead, especially when I considered the impact of my magic system and how it would have changed our own world.



Were there any specific influences?
→ One book, *True History Of The Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey, had a huge impact on me. It felt incredibly authentic to have Ned Kelly tell his story, spelling mistakes and all. I knew that Gant would seem much more real if I could similarly tell his story in his own limited way.

Snakewood is published by Orbit on 17 March.

SCI-FACT! A competitive fencer since he was a child, Kieran Bew was 21st at the 1996 Cadet World Championships.

FIVE MINUTES WITH...

KIERAN BEW

The *Beowulf* star on fantasy, fencing and the perils of fame

HE'S NOT THE BEOWULF WE KNOW

"He's more human, in a way, and not in such a rush to get involved. The Beowulf that's depicted in the poem has an arrogance and swagger to him."

A RELUCTANT HERO

"The notoriety of being a famous hard man isn't what it's cracked up to be. Look at people like Wild Bill Hickok, who was portrayed in *Deadwood* as a guy who's sick of people always trying to kill him. Beowulf has been famous since he was a child because of this thing he did, and that has a knock-on effect."

NORTH BY NORTH-EAST

"The thing about the Northumberland region is that we have such vast beaches, mountainous terrain and very dense forests. We also have very hearty working crews who are used to the weather. I loved the quarry where we worked, but it could get pretty vicious. The wind had a character of its own, especially with all the long hair, costumes and capes. It added an element of danger."

DAB HAND WITH A SWORD

"I've fenced since I was nine years old, and have been jumping around with wooden sticks and stuff for a lot longer than that. Sometimes there wouldn't be any time to prepare, as we had to choreograph and shoot a sword fight within half an hour. But because of all the movies I've grown up watching, I had the skills to do that."

IT'S GRIMDARK UP NORTH

"A friend recommended Joe Abercrombie's *The Blade Itself*. I enjoyed it so much that I ended up buying it for all my cousins for Christmas. So to play a part like this has been wonderful."

Beowulf is currently screening on ITV.

© JOUPIN GHAMSARI

SCI-FACT! Sarah Wayne Callies also played a grieving mother in *Pay The Ghost* – a Nic Cage-starring horror.



Young Logan Creran plays the boy who comes back.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

CHILD'S PLAY

Storage 24 director dares you to open *The Other Side Of The Door*

While he now has a young son himself, Johannes Roberts didn't have any children when he first embarked upon his new film, *The Other Side Of The Door*. Set in India, it stars Sarah Wayne Callies as Maria, a grieving mother who ventures into dangerous, supernatural territory after attempting to make contact with her son, who was killed in a tragic road accident.

"Initially the death of the child was just a plot point and I didn't realise how bleak it actually was," Roberts tells Red Alert. "It was only when we started filming the car crash scene that the movie really took a turn to the dark side. I remember turning to Sarah and going, 'Christ, this is really dark!' and she was like 'You think so?'"

Best known for *The Walking Dead*, Callies may have recalled some familiar and disturbing emotions after Laurie Grimes, her character in the hit zombie show, died in childbirth. "She found it tough as she had to go to some places that were not fun for her," says Roberts, who believes that Maria and Laurie boast similar qualities. "Sarah has this strength, which I think is just in her full stop. She has got plenty of backbone. She's not a fragile, dainty actress; she's a very real person and that comes through in the roles that she plays."

Bringing to mind a more sinister *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, *The Other Side Of The Door* is influenced equally by classic short stories like WW Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw" and more contemporary chillers like Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*. "I've always loved ghost stories," Roberts says. "Doors are such a big part of horror, as what's on the other side is always such a big thing."

Also taking inspiration from Asian horrors like *The Ring* and *The Grudge*, Roberts believes that India is a relatively unexplored cinematic location. "There's a village in the south called Bhangarh, which is apparently the most haunted place in the world," he says. "The villagers all disappeared and even today nobody knows what happened to them. The village itself is fenced off and there's a sign outside saying, 'Don't enter after dark because the ghosts of the dead walk the village.' I just thought, 'Wow, what a crazy place,' and I thought it would make for an interesting story to put a Western couple among all that madness."

The Other Side Of The Door opens on 18 March.

NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ **Bad Robot** have dropped a trailer for **10 Cloverfield Lane**. The surprise sequel is out 11 March.

→ **Star Wars: The Force Awakens** is at least the third highest grossing film of all time at the worldwide box office – though beating *Avatar*'s record is unlikely.

→ Marvel, meanwhile, will publish a new **Star Wars comic** based around Poe Dameron.

→ **Guillermo Del Toro** has signed on to produce **Scary Stories To Tell In The Dark**.

→ **Alan Moore** has announced that his second novel, **Jerusalem**, has been completed.

→ **The Martian** bizarrely named best comedy/musical film at **Golden Globes**.

→ **Mad Max: Fury Road** took home three gongs at the **London Critics' Circle Film Awards**.

→ The *Narnia* movies will be rebooted, with **The Silver Chair** the first in a new series.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"WORKING WITH HIM AT SUCH A FORMATIVE AGE WAS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT AND I WILL CARRY THE LESSONS HE TAUGHT ME FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE AND CAREER."

Daniel Radcliffe pays tribute to Alan Rickman, who passed away on 14 January. The actor played many iconic roles, including Snape in the *Harry Potter* series.



SCI-FACT! **Sophie Turner learned archery to play Jean Grey. Perhaps she's going full Katniss.**

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

OUT 19 MAY 2016

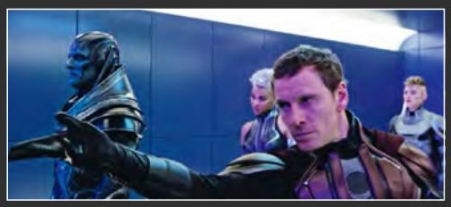
Marvel's mutants face a big blue world-ending threat



Ancient Egypt – the home turf of En Sabah Nur, aka Apocalypse. Expect a fair bit of flashback action.



After centuries of slumber, the god-like Apocalypse wakes up to find a planet that no longer worships him, and he's not best pleased.



Apocalypse recruits four horsemen – Magneto, Storm, Archangel and Psylocke – who attack Xavier's mansion.



Mystique leads the younger X-Men (and returning CIA agent Moira MacTaggert), but to where and why?



The new(ish) kids on the block: Jean Grey (Sophie Turner), Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee) and Cyclops (Tye Sheridan).



Apocalypse can change size in the comics, but this fight with Xavier is likely taking place on the Astral Plane.



Film-stealer Quicksilver returns, and he's up to his old tricks zipping around Xavier's school.



Archangel (Ben Hardy) unfurls his metal wings and unleashes a volley of metal daggers.



A mohawk-sporting Storm rides in on lightning. She's alone and disillusioned at the start of the film, which Apocalypse exploits.



Apocalypse may be a mighty god, but that doesn't stop him from engaging in a spot of villainous monologuing.



Wiping out humanity and starting afresh is Apocalypse's endgame – not too tricky when Storm can create giant water geysers.



James McAvoy's transformation into Patrick Stewart is complete. He's even rolling around on the chair from the first film.

The Buzz



RUSSELL There's stuff I like in here: the big guy on the rug, Quicksilver, Magneto showing off. I also like the doomy music. Let's hope the film's not too portentous and grey. Have fun, X-guys!



IAN The sight of a man with hairloss shouldn't really be a punch-the-air moment, but I did... This feels epic, Oscar Isaac looks great as Apocalypse, and I love the' 80s threads. Properly excited.



WILL Still not convinced by Apocalypse's blue noggin, but this looks strong. I hope it doesn't get too carried away with the city demolition stuff, though.



RHIAN Jubilee's jacket, Storm's mohawk, the Prof's lack of hair... it feels like there are a lot of visual "yes!"s here to appeal to fans – let's just hope they get the story right as well.

LIGHT AND MAGIC

Europe's premier visual effects event, *Escape Studios' VFX Festival*, is ready to take over London

DATE 23-25 February
LOCATION The O2, Peninsula Square, London

Founded by Escape Studios – Europe's leading visual effects academy – the VFX festival has become a highlight of the special effects calendar. Across three days, it will explore a myriad of themes, with guests from big-name studios such as The Mill, MPC and ILM. We spoke to Escape's *Dom Davenport* to find out more about the event...


Life on Mars: Matt Damon keeps on surviving.

Augmented and virtual reality are hot topics of discussion this year. Are these the future of visual effects?

We're still very much at the beginning of a journey to explore how these technologies can extend the reach of media and enhance pre-existing entertainment. The game-changer will be when the tech is available to everyone through their smart devices.

Day two is all about movies such as *The Martian*. Is Hollywood still on the cutting edge of effects, or has that moved to games?

The Martian is definitely at the cutting edge of seamless, photo real and invisible effects. Conjuring up a world we can only still really imagine is a feat in itself, game engines are catching up, but the sheer level of detail can only really exist in pre-rendered content.

There's a heavy focus on recruitment. Is effects a tough industry to enter?

Recruitment has shifted away from just purely technical or artistic skills. Now the industry needs people who have what would previously have been seen as soft skills. People who are good at working in groups and with clients, or who have an entrepreneurial spirit and are good at spotting opportunities or generating IP. It is competitive, but if you have the right experiences during your education it is a fulfilling, creative and authentic career choice.

What are you most looking forward to at the festival?

I'm hosting a panel on day three about how we could reimagine the current education system to foster and nurture creativity, innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit. We have great guests including Ian Livingstone, co-founder of Games Workshop and Eidos, and Alex Hope, co-founder of Oscar winning VFX company, Double Negative. I'm really looking forward to hearing what they have to say.

The VFX Festival, created by Escape Studios, will run from 23-25 February at The O2, London. www.thevfxfestival.com

DATE 20-21 February
LOCATION Excel Centre, London

GRAPHIC SCENES

All the best writers and artists will be heading to the fifth annual ***London Super Comic Con***



Leeds' Thought
Bubble may be the hot ticket on the UK comic con scene, but capital-dwellers shouldn't feel left out. London Super Comic Con brings a top-drawer selection of comics creators together for two days of four-colour fun. Guests this year include the likes of Jill Thompson (*Sandman*), David Lloyd (*V For Vendetta*, *Aces Weekly*), Mark Buckingham (*Fables*) and Frank Cho (*Hulk*). The artists' alley is a great way to meet and buy from your favourites and there will be plenty of cosplay fun and exhibitors including *2000 AD* and Avatar Press.

Tickets are on sale now and start at £18.50 for individual days, with weekend tickets also available. If you're feeling flush you can buy the "Comic Creator Event" package for £150, which guarantees you fast-track entry and the opportunity to hang out with creators. Discounts are available on standard tickets and children aged four and under get in for free.

www.londonsupercomic convention.com

COMING UP

OXCON 2016
5-6 March
The Oxford-based convention is a great chance to meet former Ewok Michael Henbury, Death Eater Jon Campling and many more.
www.oxcon.xyz

SCI-FI WEEKENDER
17-20 March
Ear-splitting titan Brian Blessed is back (again), alongside the likes of *Star Trek: Voyager*'s Garrett Wang and *Game Of Thrones*' Kerr Logan.
www.scifi weekender.com

FILM & COMIC CON CARDIFF
5-6 March
Lots of *Doctor Who* guests here, including Colin Baker, Nicola Bryant and Deborah Watling, who will all no doubt be keen to visit Ianto's shrine.
www.filmandcomiccon cardiff.com

SCI-FI SCARBOROUGH
9-10 April
Sporadically sunny Scarbs will be playing host to the likes of *Babylon 5*'s Claudia Christian, original Holly from *Red Dwarf* Norman Lovett and *Doctor Who*'s Dan "Strax" Starkey.
www.scifi scarborough.co.uk

NINE WORLDS
12-14 August
The self-proclaimed "geekfest" returns for its fourth outing, and it has a new big city venue – the Novotel London West. Expect loads of panels, a vendor room and more.
nineworlds.co.uk

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EXCLUSIVE INCENTIVES FOR ONLINE ORDERS

SCI-FACT! The British army was drafted in to play extras for *Rogue One*'s battle scenes.

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

Disney strikes back with a story from a long time ago

OUR ONLY HOPE

Looking forward to your next fix of *Star Wars*? You don't have long to wait. This December we'll be returning to that galaxy far, far away. But this "Star Wars Story" isn't focusing on the Skywalker clan. Instead, it will bridge directly into the events of *A New Hope* – in fact, its central McGuffin is what powered *Episode IV*'s plot...

THAT'S NO MOON...

Anyone familiar with the opening minute of *A New Hope* will have a pretty good idea of the basic plot (and by all means angle this page while humming John Williams' theme): "Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR."

MONSTER MAN

So it's a gritty heist movie against the backdrop of a massive, daring ground and space battle. And the chosen one bringing balance to this two-for-one *Star Wars* experience is Gareth Edwards, who handled the intimate character drama of *Monsters* as well as the CGI decimation of San Francisco in his 2014 take on *Godzilla*. This will be his biggest picture yet...

REBEL ONE

Heading up a team of hardened, grimy rebels, mercenaries and thieves is serious thesp Felicity Jones, charged with an almost-certainly fatal mission to rifle through the Empire's filing cabinets in search of a way to kick in the Death Star's exhaust pipes. But can the gang trust anyone else – or indeed each other – along the way?

THE SCOUNDREL SQUAD

Edwards has surrounded Jones with a team of top-quality scum and villainy, including Diego Luna, Riz Ahmed, Forest Whitaker and – we'd bet playing the team's "Imperial" inside-man – Mads Mikkelsen. Providing the muscle is Donnie Yen, who should hopefully get the chance to put his talents to more use than the guys from *The Raid* did in *The Force Awakens*. Meanwhile *Serenity*'s Alan Tudyk is playing a mo-cap character. It's *probably* not a Gungun...

BACK IN BLACK

But the big rumour is who is likely to be on their trail: Darth Vader is not keen on being made to look a fool, and with James Earl Jones providing new dialogue for the *Rebels* cartoon, we're surely due an appearance by the Sith Lord... That means there's also the possibility of Grand Moff Tarkin lingering around the edges, although the excellent Ben Mendelsohn – creepiness in carbon-form – will be playing the movie's main baddie.



STAY ON TARGET

Of course, the word "Rogue" has a special place in the hearts of *Star Wars* fans. It was the title of one of the fighter squadrons which subsequently – in the now defunct expanded universe – became the *nom de guerre* of Wedge's team of ace fliers. Expect some spectacular dog fights at the very least.

WHEN DOES IT ARRIVE?

The rebellion starts on 16 December.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"IT'S ADVENTURESOME AND EXCITING IN A WAY. I THINK THE KIDS NEED TO GO TO LIGHTSABER FIGHT SCHOOL, BUT THAT'S JUST ME THINKING THAT."

Samuel L Jackson isn't the most forthcoming with his praise for the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* cast.



AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

SHOWRUNNING

→ **Marvel's Most Wanted** (the *Agents Of SHIELD* spin-off starring Bobbie Morse/ Mockingbird) has received a pilot order.



→ Zygon creator **Robert Banks Stewart** has passed away at the age of 84.

→ Neil Patrick Harris to star as Count Olaf in Netflix's **A Series Of Unfortunate Events**.

→ BBC America to produce a new **Dirk Gently** series, scripted by *Chronicle*'s Max Landis.

→ **American Horror Story** season six to be set in two separate time periods.

→ **Heroes Reborn** has been re-axed...

→ *Doctor Who* writer Peter Harness to write a new adaptation of **The War Of The Worlds**.

→ Mackenzie Davis and Gugu Mbatha-Raw cast in new **Black Mirror**.

→ Spoiler! **Star Wars Rebels** to bring back Darth Maul...

→ The **Bring Back Dredd** campaign has switched its focus to TV.

© REX FEATURES (1)

SCI-FACT! Shannon filmed his scenes on ***Midnight Special*** at the same time as playing Zod in ***Man Of Steel***.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

HEROES FOR HIRE

David Walker tells us why the time is right to reunite ***Power Man And Iron Fist***

Although soon set to star in their own individual Netflix shows, Luke Cage and Danny Rand haven't actually appeared in their own team book for three decades. But later this month the two heroes will join forces for a brand new *Power Man And Iron Fist* series, written by *Cyborg/Shaft* scribe David Walker and drawn by Sanford Greene.

"This is the first time that Danny and Luke have co-starred in a title of their own since the 1980s, so there's considerable significance to them reuniting under the banner of their own book," Walker tells Red Alert. "This particular pairing is very iconic, even for fans that didn't initially read *Power Man And Iron Fist*, or came to discover the original comic after the fact."

According to Walker, it could be the sharp contrast between their strikingly different backgrounds and outward appearances that really make Luke and Danny's partnership so distinctive. "There's just something else about these two guys, especially for long-time fans," he says. "The fact of the matter is that the friendship between Luke and Danny is one that readers have seen develop and grow over the years. We've been a part of their lives and seen these guys through good times and bad, and to see them back together again is like seeing your favourite band get back together with the original members."

Power Man And Iron Fist #1 is published by Marvel on 17 February.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE



ROAD TRIP

With *Midnight Special*, director Jeff Nichols is looking back to the '80s...

***Mud* writer/director Jeff Nichols** pitched his latest movie as a "sci-fi chase film", but his inspirations were rather grander. *Midnight Special* stars Adam Driver, Kirsten Dunst and Michael Shannon and was shaped by Nichols' love of two genre classics from the '70s and '80s. "Aesthetically, the film was influenced by *Close Encounters* and especially John Carpenter's *Starman* – with its use of anamorphic lenses and blue light, and the beautiful night photography," he tells Red Alert. "I wanted the story to be fast-paced and take place mostly at night. In terms of character and plot, this is like all of my previous films – grounded in reality and rooted in character and drama."

The film tells the story of Roy (Shannon), who discovers that his eight-year-old son Alton (Jaeden Lieberher) possesses otherworldly powers, making him the target of a manhunt. "The story came to me after I became a father, when my son started experiencing seizures," says Nichols. "The movie is about this father-son relationship, and it just so happens that the boy has supernatural powers."



Michael Shannon was drawn to *Midnight Special* by his own parental experiences. "Alton is the most important person in the world to Roy, which is how I feel as a father," he says. "But Roy is not sure who Alton is. Alton has abilities, powers, that seem to come from some alien source. As the story unfolds, I start to question whether his powers come from a place of malevolence."

Nichols brought the same stripped-down approach to *Midnight Special* that he relied on for his previous films, favouring practical effects over CGI. "Alton emits light from his eyes," he explains. "We rigged glasses with LED lights, which were put on lenses and placed over the retinas. I want the effects to look impressive, but I also want the audience to be asking questions after the film ends."

Midnight Special opens in cinemas on 15 April.

Celebrating the life of David Bowie, sci-fi icon!

SCI-FACT!

Bowie was offered the role of Sharaz Jek in *Doctor Who*'s "The Caves Of Androzani", but sadly turned it down.



HIS MUSIC WAS SCI-FI

Bowie's first hit, 1969's "Space Oddity", follows the journey of Major Tom – an astronaut who trips way out into the cosmos – and Bowie would return to the character periodically (culminating in last year's "Blackstar" video). The *Diamond Dogs* album was borne out of an attempt to create a musical of Orwell's *1984*; and his *Outside* album was a dystopian cyberpunk mystery. But Ziggy Stardust was undoubtedly Bowie' biggest creation. This pansexual alien superman arrived like a lightning bolt and picked on you to hear his glam rock message.

BOWIE THE MUSE

You can find Bowie in every aspect of pop culture. Time-travelling cop show *Life On Mars* and its sequel *Ashes To Ashes* were named after Bowie songs. When Neil Gaiman created the Sandman he based his Lucifer around '70s Bowie, while Luci in Gillen and McKelvie's *The Wicked + The Divine* also bears more than a passing resemblance.



A STAR OF THE BIG SCREEN

Bowie was also an actor. His starring role in Nic Roeg's *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976, pictured) earned rave reviews, while he played a vampire cellist in *The Hunger* (1983) and Nikola Tesla in *The Prestige* (2006). But it was Jareth the Goblin King in *Labyrinth* (1986) that became his most famous screen appearance, complete with fright wig and giant codpiece.



© GETTY (1)

SCI-FACT! **Billy Cranston (the Blue Ranger) was named after an at-the-time obscure actor – *Breaking Bad*'s Bryan Cranston.**



Some people just don't take well to artistic criticism.

SHOWRUNNER SPEAKS

TIME FOR ANSWERS

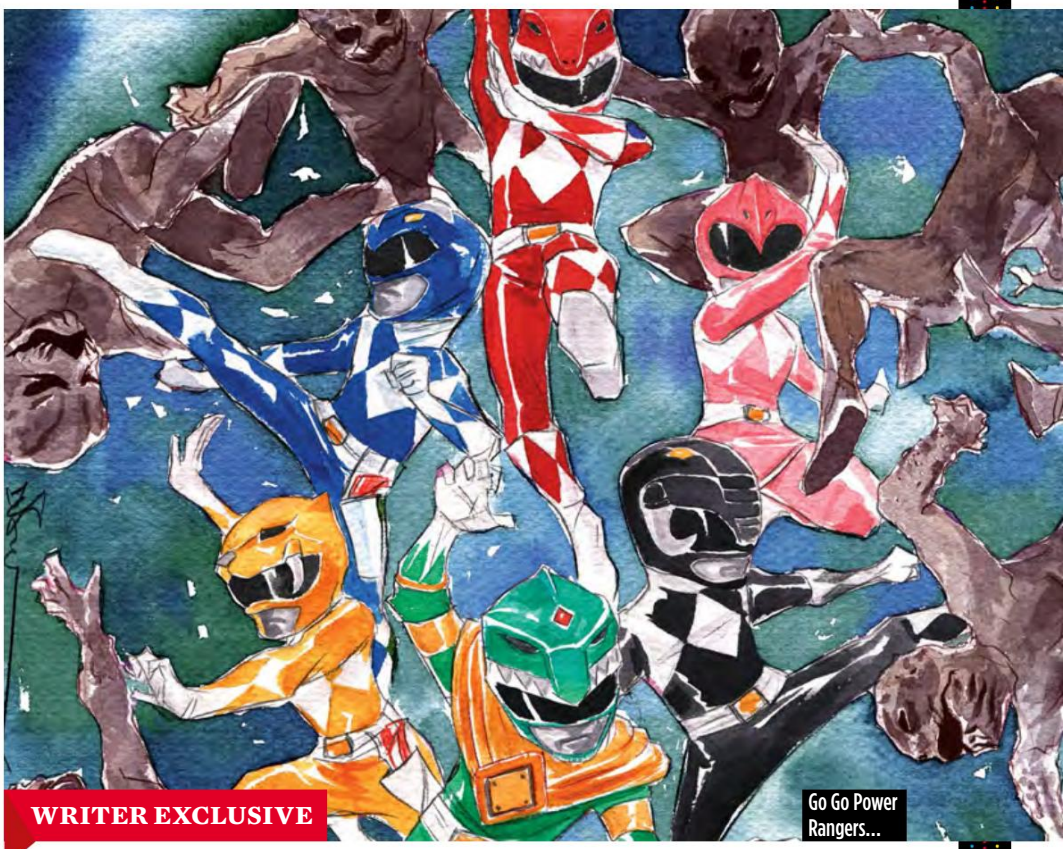
Things are about to get complicated in ***12 Monkeys***' second season...

***12 Monkeys* finished up its first** year with a jaw-dropper of a finale. A mortally wounded Cassandra "Cassie" Railly was sent to 2043 so Dr Jones could save her. However, Deacon and the Army of the 12 Monkeys had stormed the temporal facility and taken over. Cole and Ramse are now stuck in the present day with no means of time travel. And the unpredictable Jennifer Goines possesses vials of a disease that could potentially wipe out mankind. In other words: a perfect storm of potentially civilisation-destroying horrors.

"Season two picks up a few months after the events of the finale in the present day and in 2043, roughly where we left off with Cassie having just arrived," says executive producer Terry Matalas. "Some answers we get into right away are: what will Cole and Ramse's relationship be after last year's betrayal and how will that change the way Railly feels about Cole? We'll learn Jennifer's plan for the virus and we'll learn just what the 12 Messengers in hoods and flaky skin wanted with our temporal facility. And there's much more."

But the series is also set to complicate its tangled plot further. "We'll learn that the plague was only part of the 12 Monkeys' plan," adds Matalas, intriguingly suggesting more layers than Terry Gilliam's original film. "There are many agendas at play... including something we've heard of before: the Red Forest."

12 Monkeys season two airs in April on Syfy in the UK and US.



Go Go Power Rangers...

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

IT'S MORPHIN' TIME!

The Power Rangers return to comics with this new ongoing series from Boom!

More than 20 years ago a group of brightly coloured teens took over the world with the debut of *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*, the TV series that spawned a $6 billion merchandise empire. Now the Rangers are leaping back into action with Boom! Studios' new series by writer Kyle Higgins and artist Hendry Prasetyo.

Their tale begins just after Tommy, the Green Ranger, has escaped the control of Rangers' nemesis Rita Repulsa. "Even as a kid, there was something a bit tragic about his story," says Higgins about Tommy. "He was the outsider, the new kid who was handpicked by the bad guys to be an agent of destruction, given powers against his will and turned into a weapon."

While the plot begins in season one of the show, the comic is set in the present. "The series is designed to be a bit more grounded and contemporary," says Higgins. "Hendry and I aren't looking to do a '90s nostalgia book or greatest hits album. We're looking to capture the spirit of the original series, adapted for a new era and a new medium. We're also exploring a lot of the inner workings of being a Power Ranger that the show was never really able to get into. Things like Ranger training and threats that take them outside of Angel Grove."

And exploring the Rangers' lives when not fighting monsters: "For all the big action and the world-ending-stakes, *Power Rangers* is a story about people," says Higgins. "These are normal kids... with the weight of the world on their shoulders. How do you manage that, plus hold onto any semblance of a normal life? High school is a tough road to navigate even without the pressures of being a superhero."

Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers is out now from Boom! Studios.



Nick Setchfield's

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



VILLAGE LIFE!

THE PRISONER

What do you want? Information? You'll get it... Veteran helmer ***Ridley Scott*** is the latest name attached to the big-screen remake of cult series *The Prisoner*. First seen in 1967, the show was the infinitely perplexing, frequently surreal vision of star Patrick McGoohan, playing a secret agent who resigns from the service only to find himself exiled to a bizarre seaside village controlled by a sinister, omniscient force with a fetish for piped blazers and penny-farthings. Cue much fist-waving at the telly by the steam-eared general audience and an equal amount of chin-stroking theorising by committed aficionados. The most recent draft of the screenplay was penned by *The Departed*'s ***William Monahan***.

Christopher Nolan was planning his own take back in 2009 but to date refuses to talk about why he abandoned it, despite exhaustive interrogation and the application of giant white balloons.

ACTORS ASSEMBLE!

AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR

We're already trembling at the thought of the Lower Manhattan insurance premiums in the next *Avengers* film. "People will not be disappointed in the amount of characters in the movie," co-director ***Joe Russo*** tells *ComicBook.com*. "The concept of *Infinity War* is that the Marvel universe unites to battle the greatest threat to the world and universe that you've ever seen, and we're going to honour that concept... We have so many



Illustration by Paul Cemmick

characters we're dealing with. We have a board with 67 characters on it." Sixty-seven characters? That's almost a collectable card set... Russo promises increased screentime for some of the superheroic subs bench. "I want to see some storytelling from some of the secondary characters. We're focusing on that right now... which characters can we pull to the forefront who potentially haven't had their own 'A' story arc to this point." Mr War Machine, we're ready for your close-up...

WAKANDA TALKIN' ABOUT?

BLACK PANTHER

Hear it on the bush telegraph: ***Ryan Coogler*** is the man who will helm the first solo Marvel movie dedicated to T'Challa, prince of Wakanda, following the character's debut in this year's *Captain America: Civil War*. "I'm excited," Coogler tells *HeyUGuys*, stressing his credentials as a longtime geek. "I grew very into pop culture, very into comic books, so it's something that is just as personal to me as the last couple of films I was able to make. I feel really fortunate to be able to work on something I'm this passionate about again." Coogler's first film was 2013's award-winning indie true-life drama *Fruitvale Station*. He's just brought us the equally acclaimed *Creed* (and if the epic single-take boxing match in that film is anything to go by we're in for some thrilling superheroic action with *Black Panther*). ***Chadwick Boseman*** is the man behind the mask when the movie opens on 16 February 2018.

TO ELBA AND BACK!

THE DARK TOWER

This ambitious, film-and-TV take on ***Stephen King***'s sprawling fantasy Western may have found its Gunslinger. ***Idris Elba*** is the frontrunner to pick up the guns of wasteland-wandering hombre Roland Deschain, a choice that's backed to the hilt by the film's writer and producer ***Akiva Goldsman***. "I'm unbelievably proud of it as a collaborator on this enterprise and because I think that he's a great actor," he tells *IGN*. "I couldn't be more thrilled that he is likely to play a part." Predictably Elba's casting has generated comment, given the character is caucasian in the books. "I understand that people who are thoughtful about the storytelling and the racial politics... might want to understand how that informs the storytelling," says Goldsman. "I respect that and I hear that, and those things are not things we didn't think about or don't think about." King himself puts it more simply: "To me, the colour of the gunslinger doesn't matter. What I care about is how fast he can draw... and that he takes care of the ka-tet."

ALSO BURNING

→ **Anne Hathaway** orbiting SF comedy *The Shower*... *I Am Legend*'s **Mark Protosevich** writing *Flash Gordon* for **Matthew Vaughn**... **Jake Kasdan** directing *Jumanji* remake for Sony... **Guillermo del Toro** developing a movie based on **Alvin Schwartz**'s kids' trilogy *Scary Stories To Tell In The Dark*... **Connie Nielsen** playing Queen Hippolyta in *Wonder Woman*... **Juan Antonio Bayona** no longer directing *World War Z* sequel... **Louis Leterrier** directing an adaptation of **Joe Hill**'s *The Fireman*... **Ben Mendelsohn** in talks to play the villain in **Steven Spielberg**'s *Ready Player One*... **Michael Bay** to direct *Transformers 5*, **Mark Wahlberg** signed to star... Disney CEO **Bob Iger** promises more *Indiana Jones*... **Kurt Russell** orbiting *Guardians Of The Galaxy 2*... *Inherent Vice*'s **Katherine Waterston** the lead in *Alien: Covenant*... **David Koepp** writing *The Bride Of Frankenstein*... **Vin Diesel** planning fourth *Riddick* film, provisionally titled *Furia*... **Mark Millar**'s *Superior* being adapted by **Brandon** and **Phillip Murphy**... **Amber Heard** in line for *Aquaman*...



> "The script's great. Much darker, but we're very excited..."

SHRINK TO FIT!

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Guillermo del Toro is turning internal, not so much *Pan's Labyrinth* as *Pan's Alimentary Canal*. He's the latest name attached to Twentieth Century Fox's remake of *Fantastic Voyage*, the microcosmic caper that saw a crack-squad of wet-suited adventurers shrunk to atomic size and injected into the body of a dying Cold War scientist ("Take one Raquel Welch and call me in the morning..."). Previously attracting heat from helmers as diverse as Paul Greengrass, Roland Emmerich and Shawn Levy, this take now has a screenplay by ***David Goyer***, who worked with del Toro on 2002's *Blade 2*. It's a collaboration between Fox and James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment, so expect the FX to be suitably dazzling. And given del Toro's fondness for cinematic monsters we're already braced for some truly terrifying platelets and corpuscles...

STILL MILLER TIME!

MAD MAX 5

Relax, Thunderdomers. Despite a recent news story that claimed ***George Miller*** was finally done with the saga of Max Rockatansky, the director assures us there's still a post-apocalyptic future in his future. "That was a completely garbled interview," he tells *The Wrap*, blaming the noise of the red carpet for the misinformation. "I said no, [another *Mad Max* movie] will not be next, and [the journalist] took that to mean I never wanted to make another *Mad Max*. It won't necessarily be next, but I have two more stories." And Miller tells *EW* that there's serious storytelling potential in ***Charlize Theron***'s film-stealing Imperator Furiosa. "She's a pretty compelling character... Her backstory is really interesting. We only allude to it in [*Mad Max: Fury Road*] because this movie is on the run. People don't have much time for recreational talk..."

REY OF LIGHT!

STAR WARS EPISODE VIII

Now that the Force has well and truly awakened and is stumbling around in its jim-jams, pouring out the Cinnamon Grahams, we're hearing there'll be more action for Finn next time around. "I'm back to keeping secrets again," star ***John Boyega*** tells *Vogue*. "[The script is] great. Much darker, but we're very excited... My part in the next film will be much more physical so I might be in the gym a bit more." *Episode IX* director ***Colin Trevorrow***, meanwhile, promises that the pay-off to the dangling mystery of Rey's parentage will be worth the wait. "We're going to make sure that that answer is deeply and profoundly satisfying," he tells *Entertainment Tonight*. "Rey is a character that is important in this universe, not just in the context of *The Force Awakens*, but in the entire galaxy. She deserves it. We'll make sure that that answer is something that feels like it was something that happened a long time ago, far away, and we're just telling you what happened." We always suspected Lobot put it around a bit, the sly old goat.

REX (1)

Worlds Of SFX

There's a whole universe to explore beyond this magazine



THIS MONTH ON gamesradar+

Five things to look out for on our massive entertainment portal at gamesradar.com/sfx

1. Now that *The Force Awakens* hype machine is slowing down, it's time to focus on the next *Star Wars* movie – *Rogue One*. Here's everything you need to know... **http://bit.ly/SFXrogue**

2. It may have been almost 13 years since *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* finished its seven-season run (yes, we know, it doesn't seem it, does it?), but that doesn't mean we've stopped watching it. Check out our favourite episodes... **http://bit.ly/SFXbuffy**

3. Don't have time to rewatch ALL of *Star Trek*? Take control of your life! Anyway, you can't go far wrong with our top 20 episodes from the original, *Next Gen*, *DS9* and more... **http://bit.ly/SFXtrek20**

4. Meet the actors up for one of the most desired parts in Hollywood – the role of young Han Solo in the *Star Wars* spin-off movie. Who do you think has the Corellian factor? **http://bit.ly/SFXsolo**

5. With the new season of *The X-Files* kicking off, we've been remembering some of the best episodes from the original nine. Could your favourite be in there? **http://bit.ly/SFXxfiles**


They want the truth. So they go to *GamesRadar+*.

Magazines & Beyond

COMIC HEROES



→ **We see in the new year with a 22-page section devoted to DC's finest, Batman and Superman, and get ready for Deadpool's big-screen adventure by catching up with co-creator Rob Liefeld. We celebrate the release of a new Asterix book by looking back at the character's eventful history. *Fight Club* creator Chuck Palahniuk tells all about his comic book sequel, while Alan Moore discusses Electricomics with his daughter Leah. We also unmask *2000 AD*'s alien editor Tharg, and Si Spurrier gives us the lowdown on *Cry Havoc*. Plus news, reviews and indie comics!**
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THE SFX NEWSLETTER



→ **Obviously picking up the latest *SFX* is one of the highlights of your month, but your fix of the world's number one sci-fi and fantasy magazine doesn't have to end there. Sign up to *SFX*'s email newsletter, and you'll get a little bit of the mag in your inbox every Friday, with prize giveaways, the week's genre news and the hottest features from *GamesRadar+*. If you're a new user and you sign up now you'll get a free download of *SFX* issue one! It'll make that long wait for the weekend to get started that little bit easier to take.**
SIGN UP NOW AT:
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TOTAL FILM



→ **It's loud, brash, and contains the occasional swear: it's *Total Film*, the mag with a mouth. This month the *TF* crew presents its Action Issue, featuring the hot scoop on *Deadpool* with on-set word from Ryan Reynolds, director Tim Miller and many more. Then there's a bit of surfing with *Point Break*, shooting with dirty-cop thriller *Triple 9*, abseiling with *Allegiant*, groaning with *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies*, and a bang-on interview with Tim Roth. All this plus the best movie reviews on the planet. If your newsagent doesn't have it, curse like a sailor.**
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ZOMBIES: THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION



→ **We're bringing out our dead again! Yes, for a Valentine's gift with a difference we suggest our new zombie bookazine. All your favourite shuffling, decaying corpse movies and TV are here, including *The Walking Dead*, *28 Days Later*, *Shaun Of The Dead*, *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies* and *Land Of The Dead*. Plus *even more* films with "dead" in the title in our rundown of the finest 66 zombie films to have graced the silver screen. You'd have to be braindead not to buy it! (Sorry, is that a bit tasteless?)**
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Next Issue



DAREDEVIL

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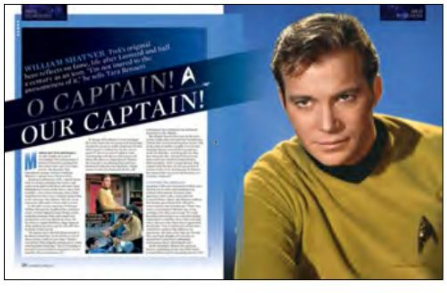
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First Contact



THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

RICHARD EDWARDS, EDITOR



Turns out a ton of you wanted to talk about *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* this month. Who'da thought it? Unsurprisingly there was a hell of a lot of love for JJ Abrams' movie on all our communications nodes, but nearly as many of you wished that the story was just a little more original. Elsewhere, *Star Trek*, *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who* and *ThunderCats* have been occupying your thoughts. If you've got something to share for a future issue, get in touch through any of the regular channels.

SFX Hot Topic

Your views on the month's big issue

#STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

James Metherell, Facebook I fell in love with the original movies at the age of six. *The Force Awakens* made me feel like that child again.

Ross Warren, Facebook I've seen it four times so far and it's everything I'd hoped for. It feels like *Star Wars*, introduces strong new characters and leaves it open to go in very exciting directions in parts VIII and IX.

Jimithyh, GamesRadar+ I've been wondering for years if and when *Star Wars* will be remade. It was with *The Force Awakens*.

Mark Howe, Facebook This was a set-up movie to pass the torch to the new generation. It's not out there to reinvent the wheel, but to remind the world how great the originals were.

James Kinsley, email So, it starts with some secret plans (sorry, a map) being hidden in a droid and smuggled to the Rebellion (sorry, Resistance), has a father/son "revelation" in the middle part, and ends with Han Solo sneaking into and blowing up a shield generator so some X-wings can blow up a planet-sized laser gun. Don't get me wrong, as a greatest hits package, it's SENSATIONAL but I hope they've something new up their sleeves for *Episode VIII*...

Heyzeus7, GamesRadar+ It was definitely *Star Wars*, and it definitely featured JJ Abrams' strengths as a filmmaker: relentless pacing, thrilling action, deft character development and emotional pay-offs. It also, however, highlighted JJ's weaknesses as a filmmaker: plot holes the size of the (old!) Death Star and smooth repackaging without really introducing anything innovative.

SFX ***Now that Star Wars is well and truly back, I'm expecting Episode VIII to be something very different. What's the point of hiring the brilliant Rian "Looper" Johnson to write and direct it if you're just going to make a retread of an old movie?***

Liam Curry, Facebook People are so happy to be back in the galaxy far, far away that they're oblivious to the movie's shortcomings.

Iain James Wilks, Facebook Really underwhelmed by the whole thing. Too many trailers left very few surprises.

Russell Smith, email I think the level of violence has increased to a level such that the film can



Still the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy.

Han Solo: master of catalogue poses.

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> I hope they've something new up their sleeves for *Episode VIII*

no longer be considered to be family-friendly. It is one thing Stormtroopers being felled by lasers as in the original trilogy but quite another having blood splatters and extended scenes of torture. As with the James Bond films, each producer feels that moving forward requires more violence, horror and shock. It saddens me that "family-friendly" franchises are being drawn away from families. How long will it be before a *Star Wars* film gets a 15 rating?

SFX *I don't think a Star Wars movie will ever get a 15, but the 12A (and the PG-13 in the US) has definitely given blockbuster filmmakers carte blanche to up the violence without risking box office. Perhaps they should think about toning it down at times.*

Neil Tex Hickman, Facebook As good as it was to see them, the older characters kind of got in the way for me. I wanted to see more Finn, Poe Dameron and Rey.

Jonathan Mock, Facebook Way too much Mark Hamill in it.

SFX *What do you expect for second billing in the credits?*

Look out for the next SFX Hot Topic at bit.ly/SFXHotTopic



The absolute star of the new film – with Rey.



Eye eye, Captain...

#SUPERNATURAL SELECTION

Ann Kenney, email Let me start off by saying how much I like Jayne Nelson; she is an ace writer who loves the same sort of things that I do. That includes the best television programme of all time, *Supernatural*.

However in this month's Viewscreen [*SFX* 269] Jayne has clearly gone a bit bonkers by stating that Rowena is one of the best female characters ever to appear in the show. The best? I believe that she meant the worst! She's like a pantomime villain – I can't be the only one who feels like shouting, "She's behind you!" every time she appears.

I have never known such a hammy performance, all massive gestures and cod Scottish accent – and Ruth Connell *is* Scottish which is even more disturbing. I'm never sure if it is the actress's fault or the directors' but Rowena has brought down the tone of the programme and managed to spoil – what is it? – 13 episodes now.

SFX *Safe to assume you're not a fan, then?*

#ONE STEP BEYOND

Harold Okafor-Withers, email It has got to be a thankless task bringing out a trailer for your new movie in the month that *Star Wars* stole, but *Star Trek Beyond*'s teaser had me with its opening salvo. The Beastie Boys are an awesome choice to score the first trailer for a *Trek* movie because they're so unexpected, a statement of intent that this is gonna be different. And blowing the crap out of that ugly JJ Enterprise? Good riddance. I'm hoping any future redesign will be something more aligned with the classic lines of *The Motion Picture* version, while still delivering something new and unique.

With the Enterprise gone the crew will have to fend for themselves, so it looks like this entry in the series is definitely going to shake things up a bit.

SFX *After most of the internet – and even Simon Pegg – were critical of the trailer, Paramount will be delighted it's struck a chord with someone! (I'm optimistic the movie's going to be ace too.)*

#LIFE AFTER DEATH

Alan Dombrow, email I will be sorry to see Clara go. I think Jenna Coleman is amazing. I might even stop watching now with Clara gone but time will tell. She brought convincing, spirited energy to the show – bright, beautiful, knowing and with a →

First Contact



There's clearly more to this diner waitress than the Doctor thought...

terrific twinkle in her eye. She could have her own show – the last *Who* episode looked like a two-female spin-off is possible, so I hope so! All the companions since the reboot have been great, and the next one, plus the writing, might determine if I keep watching – not that advertisers and programme-makers care about my age group (I'm 71), even though we have the money!

SFX ***Will Clara be back? That probably depends on how well Jenna Coleman's new Queen Victoria drama does for ITV.***

Neil Alsop, email I've just caught up with *Doctor Who* season-closer "Hell Bent".

To be polite, at best it was a tedious bottle episode. To be less than polite, it was a complete and utter load of old bollocks. The gratuitous resurrection of Clara came as no surprise and neither did the poor old General having the polarity of his neutron flow reversed – though the appearance of Ashildr as the last human immortal at the end of time did spark a little interest.

Time for Steven Moffat to move on, I think, before he drags a once-great series down even further and it gets cancelled again, this time perhaps permanently.

SFX ***Woah there, Neil! I think the chances of Doctor Who getting cancelled are tiny – especially when you think of the vast amounts of money the Beeb makes from the show. And let's not forget, Moffat's sublime "Heaven Sent" aired just a week before "Hell Bent".***

#MASSIVE DISAPPOINTMENT

Pradeep Batura, email Your Massive 2016 Preview was a big let-down. Only 10 films to look forward to in 2016? I am sure there must be many other films in sci-fi and fantasy genres too which many people would pay for. You could have easily given more coverage instead of wasting so many pages on *The X-Files* and *Agent Carter* features. After all, the 2016 Preview was billed as massive by you. Moreover, I certainly did not want to see *The X-Files* on the cover of a preview special. In this manner, the disappointments began with the cover itself.

SFX ***What have you got against The X-Files?! Like you we're looking forward to loads more than 10 movies this year – but we did say the ones we listed were the 10 ESSENTIAL ones. And yep, with 40 movies/TV shows/books/comics previewed across 26 pages, we do think it qualifies as massive.***

#WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Aron Masters, email I really want there to be a *ThunderCats* live-action movie. Since the brilliant *ThunderCats* cartoon was cancelled, I've really wanted to see more – it had a wicked storyline and wicked characters, and would make for an excellent live-action origins story movie.

SFX ***Given Hollywood's love of resurrecting old franchises, I'm sure it's just a matter of time...***

Mike Garner, email *Haven* has had some stupid powers during its run but season five's 22nd episode has the strangest. A hole filling-in power? It can be seen at the end of the episode when Dave is attacking clocks with a golf club. It can't be bad continuity, can it?

SFX ***At last, a superpower with practical everyday applications! We're still waiting for the Tipp-X-Men who eliminate mistakes. (Sorry.)***

Keith Tudor, email I really enjoyed your 50 years of *Star Trek* feature and timeline in your latest issue [SFX 270]. However, in the timeline for 1993 when you list the start date for *Deep Space Nine* with the pilot episode "Emissary", you have included a picture of Worf and K'Ehleyr from *The Next Generation* season two episode, entitled "The Emissary". Apologies for being a pedant.

> "I might even stop watching *Who* with Clara gone"



The *DS9* pilot – definitely!

SFX ***Oops. Hopefully this picture will make amends.***

Andy B, email *SFX* 269... BEST ISSUE EVER! Not only did you heed my sage advice from issue 266 and adorn the front cover with the ever-delightful Gillian Anderson, but I also scored more than seven points on Blastermind for the first time ever. RESULT!

SFX ***How did you get on with our "Art And Artists" quiz on p129?***

CA$H IN THE AT-AT

POWERED BY Vectis AUCTIONS

Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

→ Skip Klauber sent us some vintage fanzines: "For many decades I've had about 15 or so fanzines from years dating to the late 1940s. They look like Xmas gifts sent out by H Gernsback to friends and such."



KATHY TAYLOR OF VECTIS SAYS:

Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967) published many sci-fi magazines. In a 1926 edition of *Amazing Stories*, Gernsback commented that there were many people reading the magazine who had never had any other contact with fellow SF enthusiasts. So he started to publish their full names and addresses on letter pages. The resulting interaction gave birth to the modern-day "fandom" phenomenon. It sparked many others to produce their own publications.

Forecast was published annually at Christmas, and the contents essentially forecast what a future could hold in store. Copies of this magazine are scarce in any condition and can retail at around £60-80.

If you've got a piece of memorabilia you'd like us to feature, send us a photo of your item with a few words about what it means to you, to sfx@futurenet.com, using the subject line Cash In The AT-AT.

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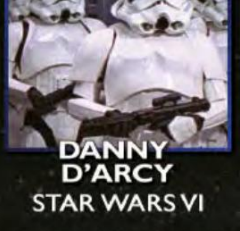
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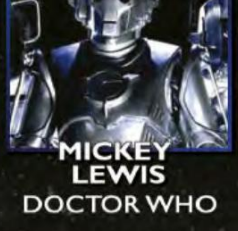
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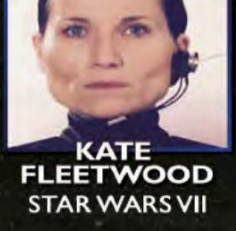
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ANT-MAN AND THE WASP

Wishlist
WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN UPCOMING MOVIES AND TV

It's all about the double act in Marvel's diminutive follow-up to last year's hit

Illustration by Paul Garner

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

HEY MARVEL! PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT OUR READERS WANT TO SEE FROM THE SEQUEL OR WE'LL UNLEASH THE BULLET ANTS!

ANT-MEN AND THE WASPS

1 Many of you told us you want the focus largely on original husband-and-wife team Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne – and not just in the present, but with plenty of flashbacks to their days working with the Avengers. Your most popular casting suggestion for Janet is inspired by real life: "Catherine Zeta-Jones as Hank Pym's wife," says **Robert William Graham**.

A SMALL WORLD

2 We got a tantalising glimpse of the *really* tiny in the first movie when Scott went sub-atomic, and you've made a resounding call that part two should return to the Quantum Realm. "A world where the laws of conventional, everyday physics are turned on their heads could be stranger than *Doctor Strange*," suggests **Iain Gilbert**.

KEEP IT DIFFERENT

3 As much as you loved *Ant-Man* and want to keep the sense of fun – "Don't you dare make this one dark!" says **Anthony Barnett** – you want the follow-up to put a new twist on the characters. Director Peyton Reed's already revealed the sequel won't be another heist movie, so where should they go next? "Maybe this could have a sort of buddy cop vibe," says **Dan Hewlett**.

A NEW KIND OF VILLAIN

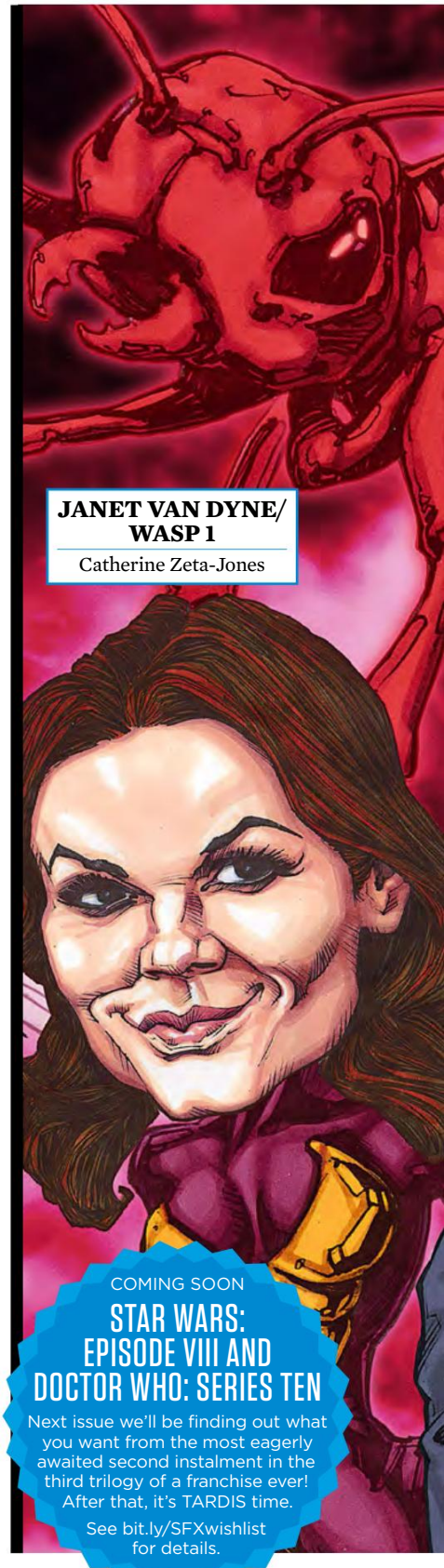
4 Another essential: don't pit the heroes against an identikit baddie – the foe should be very different to Yellowjacket Darren Cross. "They must not be a businessman, and be unable to shrink," says **Tom Houlihan**. "Be radical – something weird like the Scarlet Beetle would be great," adds **Alice Price**.

HE MIGHT BE GIANT

5 Hank Pym didn't confine himself to shrinking in the comics, and you say the movies should be no different. "Giant-Man has to be in there somewhere," says **Ben Yates**. "I'd love to see a massive Paul Rudd trampling over San Francisco."

And that's not all they want...

→ **Charlotte Biggs** This'll be Marvel's first movie with a female hero in the title – why not make the main baddie female?
→ **Andy Brown** Make sure Ant-Man and the Wasp really do have equal billing in the film.
→ **Jason Barker** The flashbacks and archive footage of the original Ant-Man in action made me want to see more. More of those please!
→ **Rob Smith** Don't overload the movie with Avengers. Keep this separate, and save the team-ups for *Civil War*.
→ **Daniel Jake** A better name!
→ **Toria** A title that doesn't morph into *Pinky And The Brain* every time I see it would be good.
→ **Keith Heeney** Ant-Man and the Wasp to face their worst nightmare... the ExTerminator, played by Arnie, of course!
→ **Jonathan Harvey** A Wasp with wings and stingers, a decent villain and a Giant-Man appearance!
→ **Kevin Biggs** Villain-wise, I'd love to see Whirlwind.
→ **torsten-scheib** An amended/MCU'd version of Eric O'Grady! Make him a Hydra agent, let him steal the Ant-Man technology and then see where *that* goes. Not only in terms of shrinking but of enlarging. Giant ants on the streets of San Francisco!
→ **MediumAtomicWeight** Ant-Man was Marvellous fun, so let's have a fun foe for the follow-up – Egghead should do the job nicely!
→ **Laura Walker** Bring Antony back from the dead! Failing that, find an Antonia.
→ **Will Evans** More "messed up dogs" please!
→ **Ed Vaughn** The tone of the first one was what made it. Keep it silly.
→ **Tom Richardson** If they're doing flashbacks, make sure they get the de-aged Michael Douglas right.
→ **Deb Gallagher** More from the Quantum Realm.
→ **Jeff Barry** Have fun with characters constantly changing size – there's so much potential for totally unique action sequences.
→ **Paul Saunders** Teach Ant-Man how to control ladybirds.
→ **Jane Morris** Get Edgar Wright in to direct it.



JANET VAN DYNE/ WASP 1
Catherine Zeta-Jones

COMING SOON
STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII AND DOCTOR WHO: SERIES TEN
Next issue we'll be finding out what you want from the most eagerly awaited second instalment in the third trilogy of a franchise ever! After that, it's TARDIS time.
See bit.ly/SFXwishlist for details.

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YOUR DREAM CAST



123

CONFLUENCE

by Paul McAuley, 1997-99

Author *Stephen Baxter* on a future where SF and fantasy collide

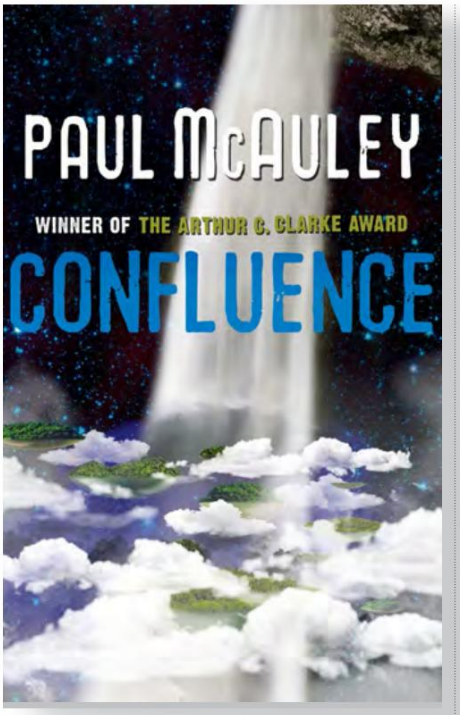


Arthur C Clarke's rather over-quoted "Third Law" of prophecy is that "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Paul McAuley's mighty trilogy might inspire a *Confluence* corollary: "Any sufficiently far-future science fiction epic is indistinguishable from fantasy."

Certainly the opening of the first volume, *Child Of The River*, has the feel of epic fantasy. On a world called Confluence, a baby is found, like Moses, drifting down a river in a basket, and is immediately surrounded by an aura of specialness: "You are the one who is to come." Yama seems to be a recreation of the mysterious Builders who constructed the world, long ago. Much of the (very readable) plot of the three books is driven by Yama's personal journey, like the Buddha's, like Jesus's, both spiritual and physical, in search of the meaning of his existence.

But this is not fantasy, as a glance at the sky reveals: "In winter, we see the Home Galaxy, sculpted by unimaginable forces in ages past, and in summer we see the Eye of the Preservers." Indeed the world itself, Confluence, is like one tremendous ship, a needle-shape, rocking as it orbits its yellow sun. This is not a magical realm but a very far future, in which everything from the machine-infested soil to the engineered sky has been manufactured or transformed, and the transformations forgotten.

And in Yama's reality a great intelligence really did create the world – the super-advanced descendants of humans who had already conquered the Galaxy – and there is a



true promise of "heaven" in the future. This is based on the theory of physicist Frank Tipler (fashionable in the '90s) that intelligences could manipulate the "Big Crunch" energies of the end of the universe to create an eternal computer simulation, within which copies of all who had ever lived could be resurrected. To the inhabitants of Confluence, the ancient Bible-like account of their world, its meaning, beginning and end, is religion, a matter of faith; we know there is engineering logic behind it.

But by Yama's time, millions of years after the creation of the world, Confluence is old, broken down, battered by waves of war, encrusted with battered monuments and looted tombs. This is classic McAuley; one of his tropes is to create a fantastic future and then to let it fall, to decay.

McAuley has acknowledged influences from Jack Vance to Gene Wolfe, and he knew exactly how to use the materials of the genre to tell his story: "I deliberately structured the three books as fantasy, science fantasy and science fiction." So in the first book, Yama, the foundling becomes a kind of knight, complete with squire; in the second book he is like a flawed superhero, struggling for mastery of his powers; and in the third book, says McAuley, "at the end ... the sword-wielding barbarian comes up against a flying saucer with a death ray."

McAuley would probably be irritated if I were to say that *Confluence* is his masterpiece. His career continues two decades on, and his work ranges from alternate history to crime to expansive solar system sagas to noirish near-future dramas. But *Confluence* is particularly masterful, a contemplation of the meaning of mortality, evolution and cosmic destiny: "Everything important has happened in the past, and we are its children..." Books like *Confluence* are what SF is for.

Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds's The Medusa Chronicles is published in May.

Like this? Try these!

BIG PLANET
by JACK VANCE (1957)
→ **A marvellous planetary romance set on a vast low-density world crowded with exotic civilisations. Very influential, and was later followed up by *Showboat World*.**



THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN
by GENE WOLFE (1980-83)
→ **The growth to manhood of a boy, Severian, set in a totally transformed world of the very far future, over four volumes. Gobsmacking.**



NEXT ISSUE

Our next Book Club outing (in *SFX* 272, on sale 2 March), sees *Planetfall* author Emma Newman discussing Mary Doria Russell's Arthur C Clarke Award-winning *The Sparrow*. If you're new to the book – or just fancy giving it another read – now's the time to do it, before a top writer gives her opinion.



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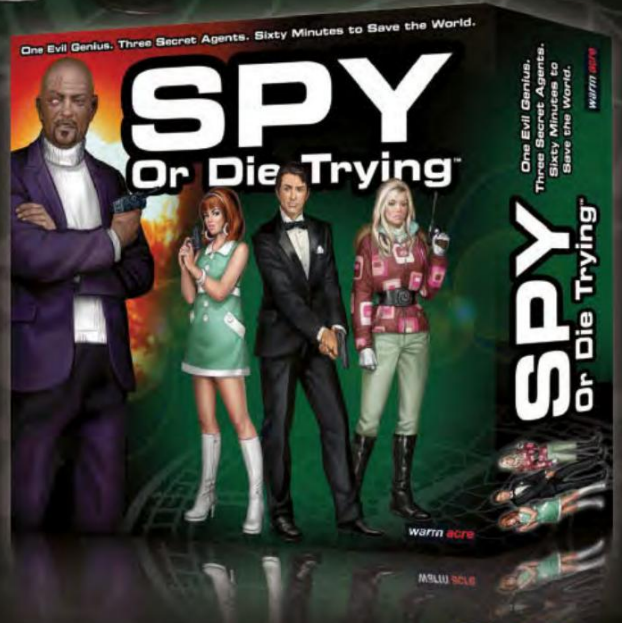


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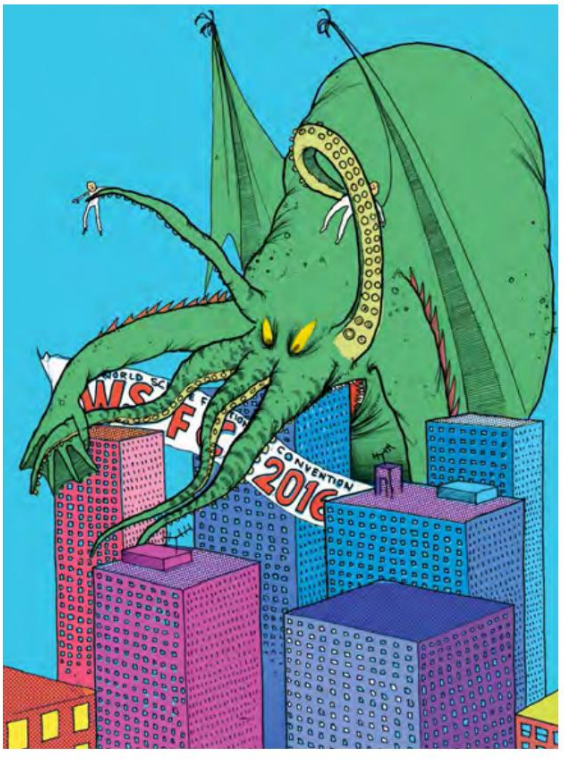
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THE CON IS ON

David Langford has a touch of convention fever



"FOR THREE CONS I SPENT THE WEEKEND IN A STUFFY ROOM FULL OF EQUIPMENT"

→ *Illustration by Andy Watt*

It's that time of the decade again, when starry-eyed fans begin to mutter about bringing the World Science Fiction Convention back to this country. London in 1957 and 1965, Brighton in 1979 and 1987, Glasgow in 1995 and 2005, London Docklands in 2014... and now there's a feeling in the air that the stars will be right in 2024 for either the awakening of Great Cthulhu to devour our puny human brains or (much the same thing as far as the organisers are concerned) yet another UK Worldcon.

From modest beginnings like the inaugural New York event with 200 people and London in 1957 – the first in Britain – with 268, these fan-run events have become biggish business with terrifying budgets and many thousands in attendance. Prospective committees need to spend significant chunks of lifetime preparing their bid and wooing the sceptical voting membership with wild parties and wilder promises. The crunch point comes with the site selection vote at the Worldcon two years before your target year. In 2015, Helsinki was chosen as the 2017 venue, to general Finnish rejoicing. After that, New Orleans and San José are the rival bids for 2018, and at Worldcon 2016 in Kansas City the voters will confirm that There Can Be Only One. So far the only hat in the ring for 2019 is Dublin.

Britain in 2024, whether or not an opposing bid emerges, will need to persuade the members of the 2022 event. This, according to worldcon.org/bids, is currently a toss-up between Chicago – a plausible venue that's hosted many a past Worldcon – and Doha, Qatar, a concept that frankly makes my sense of wonder blow a fuse. Especially when I remember some of the Worldcon community's more *interesting* people and practices in the light, or the murk, of Qatar's human rights record.

If 2024 seems a long way off, that's because it is. For less delayed gratification there are British UK conventions all the year round. This year's national event – the annual Eastercon – is called Mancunicon, and readers deeply versed in the subtleties of linguistics will deduce that it's in Manchester: for full information see www.mancunicon.org.uk. 2017 should be making history with the first ever Welsh Eastercon: Pasgon in Cardiff, whose details have been leeked at www.pasgon.org.uk.

For my own part I have fondish memories of being on various UK con committees, one an Eastercon; of chairing a long-ago Eastercon bid that went for a hyper-expensive central London venue and mercifully lost; of organising Hugo trophies for one of the Brighton Worldcons; and of almost entirely missing three conventions because I spent the weekend in a stuffy room full of equipment, editing and publishing the several-times-daily con newsletter. When I gaze bleary-eyed on these past glories and feel the urge to have another bash at convention-running, I dose myself liberally with whisky and lie down quietly until the feeling passes away. It's your turn now. Anyone's turn but mine.

The Readers of SFX: How, oh how, can I join the exciting discussion about planning a 2024 UK Worldcon?

Myself: This may be a terrible secret with which humanity should never meddle, but if you insist... send a grovelling email to FutureUKworldcons@googlegroups. Just don't blame me if you end up with one of the tough Worldcon jobs like disposing of the bodies after a guest appearance by George RR Martin.

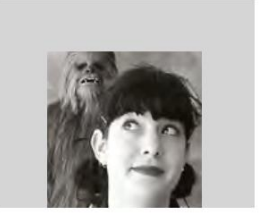
David Langford's listing of UK conventions and Worldcons at news.ansible.uk sometimes even gets updated.

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THE LADY KILLERS

Bonnie Burton speaks up for female bounty hunters



"THERE ARE WOMEN IN SF WHO BRING IN THE BOUNTY JUST AS WELL AS THE LADS"

→ *Illustration by Maria Colino*

For as long as there have been fugitives there have been bounty hunters. Bad guys don't stand a chance of making a clean getaway if a talented man or woman can track their every move, sling a pair of handcuffs on them and bring them in to face justice.

Bounty hunters seem to have made their mark even more profoundly in our favourite books, comics, videogames and movies than they have in the real world. In fact, some of the most beloved characters in sci-fi happen to be criminal chasers for hire.

But for some reason, bounty hunters always seem to be remembered as men, when there are actually some very impressive women in sci-fi who can bring in the bounty just as well as the lads. Personally, I've always had a special appreciation for women who can become successful in a career dominated by men. And being a bounty hunter definitely qualifies as a gig full of guys.

My first glimpse of what a job as a female bounty hunter must be like is when I saw Jinx in the '80s cartoon series *GI Joe*. She discovered she had family ties to a secret group of ninjas called Arashikage Clan that took her in and trained her in deadly martial arts. She's later recruited into the GI Joe team and from there goes on covert operations to keep America safe from the evil Cobra. After the team dismantles, she's a free agent bounty hunter.

I always admired Jinx because she never let anyone treat her like she was second-rate compared to the men on her team. She was an equal, and quite frankly had better martial arts fighting skills than all of the guys put together. You don't mess with a lady who knows how to administer a move like "Eye That Pierces".

Up next is Samus Aran from the 1986 Nintendo videogame *Metroid*. As with many heroes, her backstory is tragic. She's orphaned at a young age, but instead of playing the victim decides to take her destiny into her own hands and train as a warrior. Samus doesn't always follow the rules but she isn't afraid to fight the enemy, now matter how dangerous.

Samus becomes an almost indestructible killer after being infused with Chozo DNA. She's also equipped with a deadly arm-cannon and exoskeleton armour called the Power Suit. As a former Federation Police officer, she now makes a living as a freelance bounty hunter, tracking space pirates and parasite Metroids.

Not all female bounty hunters are working for the good guys, though. One of the coolest *Star Wars* characters, Asajj Ventress, happens to be working for the Dark Side. She may have started out with the Nightsisters – a group of women with mysterious powers – but she was trained in the ways of the Force and has a hatred for the Jedi Order. This leads to becoming a bounty hunter and assassin for Count Dooku all throughout the Clone Wars where she has been tasked with hunting down Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker.

These are only a few of the amazing female bounty hunters who have made a deep impression on those of us who want more than just a boys' club in sci-fi. Hopefully, they'll inspire the next wave of filmmakers, comic book writers, novelists, game designers and storytellers to create even more female bounty hunters who might just make us want to grab a lightsaber or arm cannon, and chase after criminals on the run.

Bonnie has a soft spot for the dastardly Aurra Sing too.

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Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

Sex-crazed zombies, cellphones and the loveliness of Stephen King

Z IS FOR ZEITGEIST

When is a zombie not a zombie? When it's your dead ex-girlfriend popping up whenever you're shagging your new girlfriend. ***Nina Forever*** (out 22 February on DVD) was one of the breakout hits from FrightFest, a lo-fi, intelligent, Brit three-hander about grief and loss which also happens to have lots of humour, gore and nudity. It's not the new zomromcom however, but a far fresher, more serious project. My only reservation might be to ask who this is for? Same question for ***Pride And Prejudice And Zombies*** (in cinemas from 11 February). Later in the year (June) look out for ***Cell***, the not-really-a-zombie-movie based on the Stephen King novel where a mobile phone signal turns callers into violent drones – it stars John Cusack and Samuel L Jackson and has promise from the King credentials alone. Then there's ***She Who Brings Gifts***, based on the MR Carey bestseller *The Girl With All The Gifts*, which has every chance of being the undead hit of 2016. It tells of sensitive, sentient little Melanie, who might be the hope for salvation despite being a bit undead herself.

BAD CALL?

More on mobile phones this spring too, as ***Rings*** (previously *The Ring 3D*) hits schedules in April. *The Big Bang Theory*'s Johnny Galecki will play a supporting role as a professor helping a young couple who've watched the cursed movie from the first two films. "One interesting thing they needed to tackle is that nobody's watching VHS tapes anymore," stated Galecki. "Now people can be cursed over their phones." A professor who's obsessed with the ring just makes me think of the *Big Bang* episode with the *LOTR* One Ring prop. Precious.

GO HARD OR GO TO HELL

It's as surprising to me as anyone that movie of the month goes to New Zealand film ***Deathgasm*** (out 29 February), another former FrightFest flick I was entirely put off by the name. In fact it's a joyful paean to death metal as scrawny outcast Brodie inadvisedly inherits some sacred sheet music from a mysterious muso and accidentally calls down the apocalypse on his small town, when he plays it in his garage with his new band Deathgasm. With teenage angst, loads of gore, a soundtrack with contributions from people called "Skull Fist" and "Nunslaughter", it's surprisingly good-natured. The first half is better than the second but at best it's like *Detention* in the world of *What We Do In The Shadows*, and at worst it's Peter Jackson does *Home And Away*.



Good luck/bad luck in *Nina Forever*.



The ruddy world's ending again in *Cell*.



Deathgasm: sweeter than you might expect.

KING OF KINDNESS

The Green Inferno is finally coming out on 12 February (DVD on 22 February) despite being completed in 2013. I saw it in 2014 and it's not great (it's really gory, the first setpiece is eye-popping but the characters are so irritating and the politics so dodgy that it gets boring fast). Apparently Stephen King was a big fan though, tweeting: "[It's] like a glorious throwback to the drive-in movies of my youth: bloody, gripping, hard to watch, but you can't look away." I love Stephen King. I honestly do. But, um, he's quoted on quite a lot of things isn't he? Glancing across just one shelf of books I can see four with King quotes on the cover (two of which are genuinely great – Sarah Lotz's *The Three* and Nick Cutter's *The Troop*). Even the book I've just finished (a decent crime novel called *The Poison Artist* by Jonathan Moore) has one: "I haven't read anything so terrifying since *Red Dragon*" (yes you have, you've read Nick Cutter's *The Troop*!). King is... well, he's the king. So what we've learned is I'm a git and he's a very well-read genius who likes lots of things. Who happens to hate Kubrick's *The Shining* and love *The Green Inferno*...

Dreadful things to do

Get yourself to Frightfest Glasgow from Thursday 25 to Saturday 27 February to see 13 prime new horror flicks. Big films this year include *The Forest* as the opener, the world premiere of *Cell* on Friday and the American remake of *Martyrs* (will it work?) on the Saturday. To book tickets and for info: www.glasgowfilm.org/festival.



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FREESPEAK

WHERE WRITERS AND OPINIONS COLLIDE

Rob Boffard is tired of keeping track of comic book universes



Professor X very much alive – and attracting a crowd.

Pop quiz. Two-part question. In the X-Men comic book universe, how many times has Professor X died, and is he currently alive or not?

I have no idea. I'm a big fan of the X-Men (and comic books in general). I'm able to give you the names, powers and history of most team members and supporting characters without thinking, but I've come to a point where I genuinely don't know whether Charles Xavier is dead or alive.

I'm not talking about the really big stuff: the new Thor, the new Cap, new Spidey. Them I get. It's the common, day-to-day stuff, like Professor X dying – be honest, he does it a hell of a lot. And Google can't help here. Are we talking *Uncanny X-Men*, *Ultimate X-Men*, or just plain *X-Men*?

It's not just Professor X. It's virtually every character, in every series. I love superheroes, but as someone who doesn't make a habit of reading every single one of their escapades every week, stuff happens faster than I can keep track of. I pick up a new book then ditch it within three pages because I simply don't have the knowledge base to understand it.

And that's just Marvel. Don't get me started on DC, which is a dark and foreboding realm filled with horrors.

According to Comicsbeat, 2015 saw a rise of around 7% in sales worldwide, totalling several hundred million dollars. So in theory, nothing's wrong with the industry's current model – publishers are making money, and there's a metric butt-ton of new titles every month to prove it.

But by now, the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universes are in full swing, so it's hardly surprising that the readership is growing. And nobody keeps data on how many of those readers end up bewildered and frustrated. The big publishers continually seem to reboot their franchises – DC's New 52 is all-but-dead, and Marvel decided to kill 33 titles after their whole *Secret Wars* storyline got massively out of hand. That, to me, says: we have a problem, and we don't know what to do about it.

I tell you this: bringing Professor X back to life for the thousandth time won't solve anything.

Rob Boffard is the author of ZERO-G, an SF thriller set on a space station, out now.

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"Anything that's futuristic and flies is a spaceship"



21 Things You Need To Know About Game of Thrones



Thrones

Season Six

THE GREATEST FANTASY SAGA ON TV HAS OUTGROWN ITS SOURCE MATERIAL – SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW? ROB POWER LOOKS AHEAD TO THE MOST UNKNOWABLE SEASON OF *GAME OF THRONES* YET...

WARNING
SPOILERS ABOUND


Bran is back after a season in the stands.

George RR Martin might well be a genius, but genius takes its own sweet time. In a recent blog post, the author admitted that the next instalment of *A Song Of Ice And Fire – The Winds Of Winter*, the follow-up to 2011's *A Dance With Dragons* – won't be ready before season six of *Game Of Thrones* airs. "Will the show 'spoil' the novels?" asks big George. "Maybe. Yes and no. I never thought the series could possibly catch up with the books, but it has." Which means, for the first time ever, readers and TV viewers alike are in the dark as to where the plot is headed. Exciting, right?

So, where were we? Predictably, given *Game Of Thrones*' predilection for killing every mother flipper in the room, there were a lot of dead – or presumed dead – folk at the end of season five. Stannis is an ex-Baratheon (as confirmed by season five finale director David Nutter), Cersei's daughter Myrcella is a gonner, and as for Jon Snow, well, who knows. But the two Royal deaths alone will have dire consequences. Is war on the horizon?

Regardless, war in Westeros is of little consequence to everybody's favourite Lannister. Tyrion was left holding a Meereen-sized baby when Daario and Jorah buggered off to track down the errant Khaleesi and her dragon. Peter Dinklage has been spotted filming at Meereen-substitute Peñiscola Castle in Spain alongside a number of emaciated extras. So... famine? Plague? Whatever it is, there's big trouble headed in Tyrion's direction.

At least some of that trouble looks to be in the form of another Red Priestess popping up in Meereen. R'hllor's disciples seem to cause grief wherever they go (we're looking at you, Melisandre), so the casting of Melanie Liburd as a "woman in red" who preaches in Meereen doesn't bode well...

Daenerys got off her royal backside last season, much to the relief of all. We'll see a return to her Khal Drogo roots this year in the form of Dothraki and dragons, although if scenes being shot in Navarra, Spain, are anything to go by, she's not going to be treated like a queen. Held captive by a rogue Khal? Dany's going to need those dragons more than ever...


Bigger and better.

Which is handy, because the dragons are growing up fast. According to VFX supervisor Joe Bauer, this season "the dragons will again double in size". Drogon and co had a wingspan of 60 feet at the end of season five, but that's going to double to 120 feet in season six. Whichever way you slice it, that's some supersized dragonage.

Speaking of dragons, is there anyone more dangerous in the Seven Kingdoms than Cersei Lannister right now? We think not. In the wake of her walk of shame, and with a mysterious, terrifying new knight of the Kingsguard (who looks suspiciously like the Mountain, brought back to life by dodgy ex-maester Qyburn) in tow, Cersei is surely out for blood. Lannister vengeance beckons.

Cersei won't be alone in attempting to make King's Landing her own, though. Margaery and Loras Tyrell, both currently prisoners of the High Sparrow, surely won't remain in chains long, and there are rumours of a faux-conversion/power-grab by Margaery. Set-spotters also report Tyrell troops – led by none other than Jaime Lannister – being filmed storming the High Sparrow's stronghold.

And that's not all for Natalie Dormer, who been on her travels this year. "I'm mainly in Belfast," she said, during an interview on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. "But I was in Spain a lot this year, I really enjoyed being



"You may remember me from such films as *Star Wars*."



Is that a Mountain we see before us?



Are the Tyrells headed to Dorne this year?

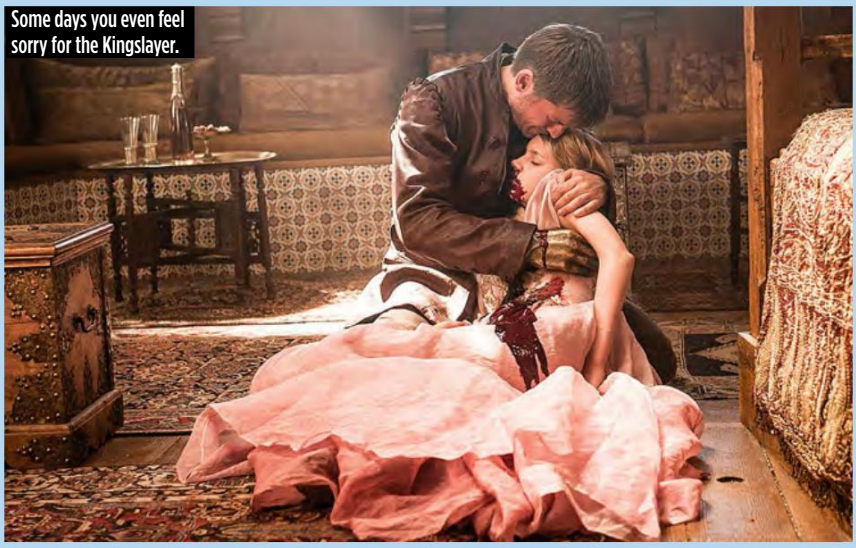
in Spain." Could this mean dear Mags is heading to Dorne? It certainly sounds like it.

And she's not the only Tyrell that has been spied in sunny Spain. Diana Rigg's imperious Lady Olenna has allegedly put in an appearance at the Alcazaba fortress in Almería, filming with the Dorne production crew. A Tyrell-Martell alliance could be pretty formidable, and spell big trouble for the Lannisters...

From women with a plan to one without: Brienne has her work cut out for her this year. Season six will likely see the further adventures of Brienne and Pod as they wander Westeros looking for Starks – and a sense of purpose. Rumour has it the Hound isn't as dead as we were lead to believe, so perhaps we'll see round two of Clegane the younger versus the Maid of Tarth. →

STATE OF PLAY

Previously on *Game Of Thrones*... everyone had a rotten time, apart from maybe Ramsay Snow – and he's a nutter



Some days you even feel sorry for the Kingslayer.

→ The formerly triumphant Lannister family was left in disarray. Jaime was despatched to the tedious kingdom of Dorne to bring back his (secret) daughter Myrcella. He succeeded, in a way – he found her, only for her to be fatally poisoned.

→ Cersei, meanwhile, was captured and tortured by religious nut, the High Sparrow. Shamed in King's Landing, she's now plotting revenge with her allies.

→ Tyrion, however, is doing rather well. He's met up with his old ally Varys and the two are working together to keep the peace in Meereen, following Daenerys's unexpected departure.



→ Daenerys, meanwhile, was rescued from an assassination attempt and flown to safety by Drogon. She's now stumbled upon a group of (friendly?) Dothraki, who may (or may not) come to her aid.

→ Don't forget about the "ice" part of "Ice And Fire". Lots happened near The Wall, including Stannis Baratheon sacrificing his daughter's life and then paying the ultimate price himself. Serves the miserable old git right.

→ After five years of build-up, the supernatural forces beyond the wall finally started to make their presence felt. The White Walkers struck the town of Hardhome, leading Jon Snow (now in charge of the Night's Watch) to forge a peace treaty with the Wildlings.

→ Er, that didn't go down too well. His "brothers" in the Watch conspired to kill him and appeared to succeed. Crikey.

→ Jon's sisters were also pretty miserable. Vengeance-mad Arya joined a creepy death cult and was blinded for her troubles.

→ Long-suffering Sansa, meanwhile, ended up marrying sadistic rapist Ramsay Snow. She escaped with Theon Greyjoy by chucking herself off a tower, hoping that the snow would break their fall – and not their necks.

→ Hodor wasn't in it, but we can all guess what his dialogue would have been like.

Will Salmon



Last series didn't end brilliantly for fan favourite Arya.

WE KNOW NOTHING, JON SNOW!

So what's the deal with our fallen Night's Watch man?



Jon Snow is dead. Or is he? Kit Harington all but confirmed that Jon is back for good while on the promo trail recently: "Let's just say that *Game Of Thrones* will remain a part of my life for a while," he said. "I'll probably be in my thirties when it's over."

That admission, coupled with the fact that he's been spotted shooting battle scenes (apparently wearing Stark armour and leading an army comprised of Umbers and other Northern houses), begs the question: how the hell did Jon survive the night of the knives?

There are a few options: first – and most likely, in our estimation – is that Melisandre summons the power of R'hllor and resurrects Jon, much as Thoros of Myr did for the extremely dead Beric Dondarrion.

If resurrection is out, then there's every chance natural Warg Jon slipped his consciousness into his direwolf Ghost. A quick bit of magic and hey presto, new Jon Snow, although *Game Of Thrones* isn't a show known for its consequence-free sorcery.

Don't rule out something altogether weirder: maybe the Wall itself saves him somehow, a mixture of ancient magic and proto-cryogenics. Or Wun Wun gives him mouth to mouth.

Whatever happens, we're irrevocably drawn to the Night's Watch vow: "Night gathers, and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death." If Jon has died and come back, does that free him from the Watch? Because if it does, well, it's about to get extremely real in the north of Westeros...

Rob Power

Talking of ass-kicking ladies, we're hoping the show will introduce a cult character this season in the form of Lady Stoneheart. Wishful thinking perhaps, as there's no sign yet that she'll appear in season six, but we live in hope. We won't spoil who she is for folk who haven't read the books but suffice it to say she's a returning character in a new guise that takes over leadership of the Brotherhood Without Banners and hunts down Freys for fun.

Naturally, this season those dastardly Freys continue their bastardly ways. House Tully, sent into freefall after the Red Wedding (remember that?), are apparently to begin season six under siege by Frey forces at Riverrun. Crappy for them, but great for us as that means we'll see the return of the Blackfish (Brynden Tully, played by Clive Russell), Catelyn Stark's uncle and official badass. Here's hoping for some Tully revenge.

In other sort-of good news for dear, departed Catelyn, young Bran is back in the frame after an entire year off. Last seen north of the Wall, deep underground in the lair of the Three-Eyed Raven (who, incidentally, has been recast, with Max von Sydow stepping in fresh from *The Force Awakens*), Bran and Hodor (Hodor!) are finally relevant to the plot again, so expect to see the young Stark



GETTY (1)

GAME OF THRONES'S TOP 10 MOMENTS



DAENERYS FREES THE UNSULLIED
"And Now His Watch Has Ended" 3.04

Daenerys has had a moral wobble. She's just bought an 8,000 strong army of slaves to help her win her quest, and she even traded one of her dragons to do so. No, Dany, no! But then... psych! She doesn't so much turn the tables as annihilate them, revealing that she was double-crossing the slave trader all along, freeing the army and unleashing hellfire. Stunning.



THE BATTLE OF HARDHOME
"Hardhome" 5.08

The White Walkers launch a brutal assault on the wildling town of Hardhome. It's hard to know which bits of this battle are the most exciting: the pressure building at the wall as the creatures pile up behind it; the giants stomping on humans; poor Karsi coming face-to-face with a group of undead children before being killed and reborn as a Walker herself... So. Much. Tension.



TYRION RALLIES THE TROOPS
"Blackwater" 2.09

King Joffrey's as much use to his troops here as a chocolate teapot, and so Tyrion steps forward to rally them for battle. "We'll come out behind them and f**k them in their arses," he yells, then while we're sniggering at that, he goes on to prove his legendary way with words can incite death and glory. "Those are brave men knocking at our door. Let's go kill them!" And so they do.



DAENERYS AND THE DRAGONS
"Fire And Blood" 1.10

If there was one thing missing from season one of *Game Of Thrones*, it was dragons. And then this happened. Daenerys, who had basically stumbled from one disaster to another since joining the Dothraki, finally, beautifully cemented her destiny as someone special by not only surviving a burial fire but also hatching three weeny beasties from her beloved dragon eggs. What a majestic birth it was.



Maisie Williams (Arya) filming for the new season. Brrrrrrr!

hone his Warg and Greenseer powers to all sorts of revelatory ends.

Sebastian Croft has been cast as Ned Stark, so an appearance from a young Eddard in some form or another seems nailed on. An educated guess tells us this will tie in with Bran's story, and opens up the possibility of some fascinating backfilling of plot details. Could we finally be about to discover the truth of Jon's parentage?

What is to become of Ayra, our favourite burgeoning assassin? Blinded as punishment for the brutal killing of Meryn Trant, she's now stuck in Braavos and at the →

These were so hard to whittle down we almost had to blindfold ourselves and point at our master list with a stick. Here are the ones we found most worthy... **Jayne Nelson**



8 JAIME TELLS HIS STORY TO BRIENNE
"Kissed By Fire" 3.05

● Jaime Lannister is a bad guy, a murderer and a rapist. But nothing's ever simple in *Game Of Thrones*, and here's a moment of vulnerability from the Kingslayer, as he tells his new sort-of-friend Brienne how he earned that bloody nickname. Amazingly, he was actually saving lives. "My name is Jaime," he insists. Quiet, masterful character-building: a signature of this show.



7 OBERYN VS GREGOR
"The Mountain And The Viper" 4.08

● "My name is Oberyn Martell. You killed my sister. Prepare to die." Well, okay, maybe Oberyn (aka the Viper) didn't actually say that, but we were all thinking it during this deadly cat-and-mouse game of a battle. And just when we think Oberyn has beaten Gregor Clegane (aka the Mountain), poor Oberyn suddenly gets a *crushing* headache. This show knows how to shock, eh?



6 CERSEI'S WALK OF SHAME
"Mother's Mercy" 5.10

● She's a murderous, back-stabbing, bitchy, hissing snake, and yet, somehow, you find yourself *actually feeling sorry* for Cersei Lannister here. Forced to walk naked through King's Landing as crowds attack, harass and insult her, just watching this scene will bring you out in a cold sweat. Lena Headey deserves every award going; we can't even imagine how hard it was to film.



3 GOODBYE, JON SNOW
"Mother's Mercy" 5.10

● Thanks to his permanent status as the put-upon, grumpy-faced action-hero who "knows nothing", Jon Snow was something of a *Game Of Thrones* icon by the time he met his fate here (possibly – season six rumours notwithstanding). Betrayed by his Watch-brothers, most notably little Olly (boo, hiss), this was a truly shocking and yet somehow inevitable finale to the show's fifth season.



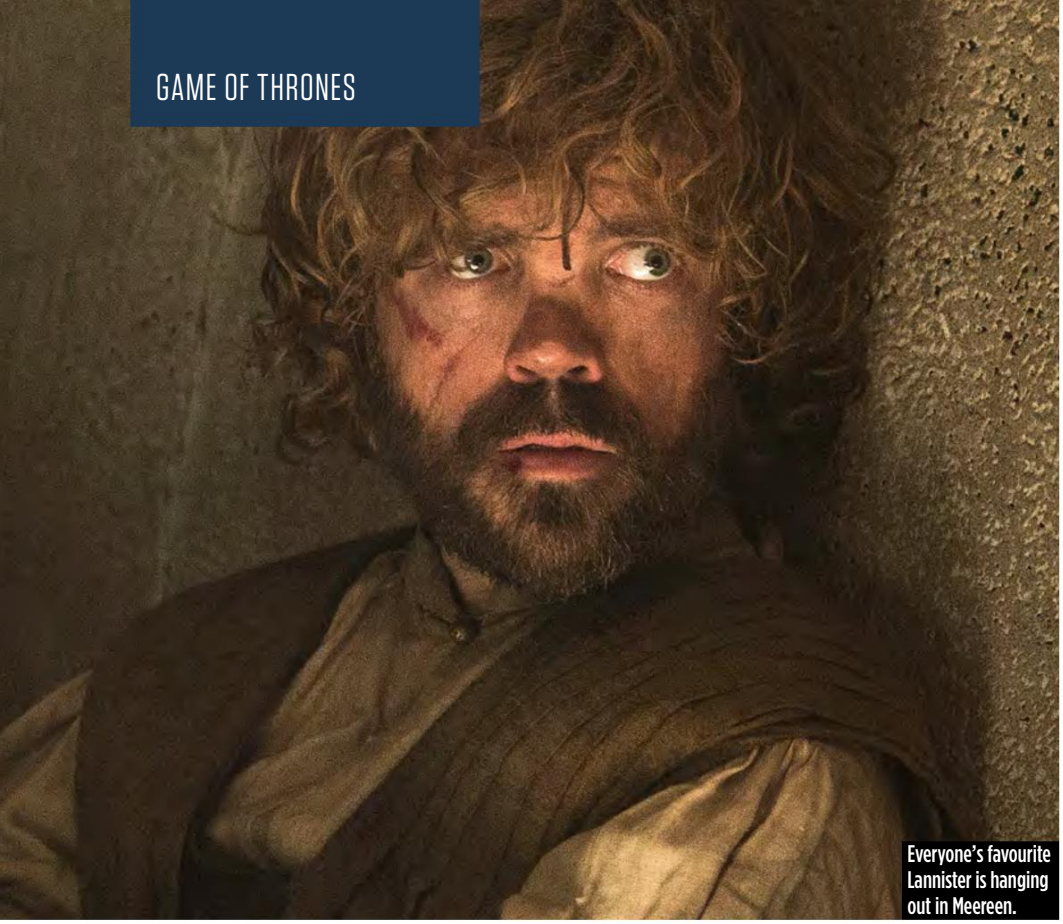
2 OFF WITH HIS HEAD
"Baelor" 1.09

● Sure, Sean Bean dies in everything he films, and sure, readers of George RR Martin's books knew he was going to die here, too, but somehow it was hard to believe it would actually happen. Ned was likeable, honourable, brave and larger-than-life, and the fact his head was lopped off in front of his own children was gasp-out-loud shocking. Boy, if we'd only known what was still to come...



1 THE RED WEDDING
"The Rains Of Castamere" 3.09

● Gruesome, tragic and unbearably cruel, this sea of carnage is surely one of the most terrifying sequences ever to air on American television. We *liked* Robb! We *liked* Talisa! We *liked* Catelyn! And yet here they were, brutally, cold-bloodedly slain, and with no punches pulled (you know the bit we mean – that poor unborn baby...). Startling, devastating drama, it was horrific enough to go down in TV history.


Everyone's favourite Lannister is hanging out in Meereen.

mercy of the House of Black and White. This season will see a travelling troupe passing through Braavos (Kevin Eldon and Richard E Grant among them), which could well prove pivotal to Arya's arc. Here's hoping she gets her eyesight back in time, eh?

While Arya continues her journey to ultimate badass-itude, Sansa is in all sorts of trouble. We last saw Mrs Bolton and Theon/Reek jumping into a snow drift from one of Winterfell's bloody great big walls. Are they alive? Well, yes, they are, but where they go now or what happens to them is trickier to answer. The north could feasibly rise up behind Sansa, and a redemption arc for Theon is surely in the offing.

Theon aside, it's been a bit quiet on the Greyjoy front of late, but with *Borgen*'s Pilou Asbæk cast as Euron Greyjoy – think "terrifying nutjob pirate" – the Ironborn should be back in the thick of it. We'd like to see Theon get back to his family, if only to see how the proud islanders react to the man he's become.


The White Walkers are approaching...

Sam the Slayer is another character heading for a family reunion, with big brother Dickon, dad Randyll, and his mother and sister all cast. Sam and Gilly are on their way to Oldtown, presumably passing *chez* Tarly en route – we can feel Samwell's famously frosty familial relationship dropping another couple of degrees already.

It's a good job Sam has left the north, as it looks like it's about to royally kick off up there. The Night's King – the White Walker leader Jon Snow encountered at Hardhome – is clearly amassing a significant force. Will the Wall finally buckle under a massive undead assault? We can't help but wonder if dragons might be the only way to defeat them. The very thought of a united Westeros, led by Daenerys, her dragons, and a resurrected Jon Snow, taking on an army of White Walkers, is almost too tantalising to deal with.

Finally, where would *Game Of Thrones* be without political machinations? Nowhere, that's where, so we're particularly looking forward to catching up with Varys and Littlefinger. The Spider was instrumental in bringing Tyrion to Meereen, but on past form he isn't the sort of man to leave the Iron Throne to its own devices. We anticipate Varys creeping back into the Red Keep, although to what end we couldn't possibly say... As for Littlefinger? Well, don't rule out the reveal of another epic long con now that the north is in upheaval...

Game Of Thrones season six starts on Sky Atlantic in the UK on 25 April.

MISSING IN ACTION

Characters who are rubbish at keeping in touch

→ Whatever happened to Gendry (Joe Dempsie)? The last of Robert Baratheon's seemingly endless number of bastard sons made a sensible choice in legging it at the end of season three, but will we ever see him again? He has a royal heritage, which sets him up as – potentially – a major player.


Will we ever see Hot Pie again?

→ How about one of his old travelling companions. Remember Hot Pie (Ben Hawkey)? The orphan left Gendry and Arya, preferring to stay and work at an inn. Come back, Hot Pie, we want to see more of your terrible baking skills.

→ We're also still holding out hope that Arya's swordmaster Syrio Forel (Miltos Yerolemou) may yet make another appearance. We saw him facing off against a gang of Kingsguard, but his eventual fate was left pointedly ambiguous.

→ Where the hell has Rickon (Art Parkinson) got to? The youngest of the Stark siblings hasn't been seen since season three. Sansa now knows that he *wasn't* murdered by Theon, so might a family reunion be on the cards?

→ Finally, the biggie. Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead Wright) and Hodor (Kristian Nairn) both sat out season five. They'll be back for season six, when we'll finally find out what they've been doing inside that massive tree for the last year.
Will Salmon


Hodor.

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NARKY ITUDE

As DEADPOOL prepares to kill it on the big screen, director Tim Miller tells Nick Setchfield about the bloodiest, craziest superhero movie yet

Career resurrections courtesy of Quentin Tarantino aside, second chances are rare in Hollywood. Just ask Deadpool. No, go on – ask him. Given he's so damn meta he doesn't so much break the fourth wall as ride a wrecking ball into it, he might just hear you...

For years it looked as though the motor-mouthed super-assassin had missed his shot at cinematic glory. High on quips and carnage, this lawless, deranged antihero emerged from the X-Men titles of the '90s to claim fan favourite status, part bad-ass, part parody of the trend for psycho-steroidal icons that swept the comics world that decade. Victim of the same experimental Weapon X program that armed Wolverine with an adamantium skeleton, Wade Wilson was gifted with the power of accelerated healing, a disintegrating mind and enough gobby self-awareness to realise that he's the star of a comic strip...

2009's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* saw him make the big screen, albeit in a neutered form scarcely recognisable to his fanbase. A screenplay for a solo adventure was swiftly commissioned by Twentieth Century Fox, a director signed, a star locked. And then the project vanished into the vortex of development hell, even as the big studios tore apart every last comic shop to find properties they could stripmine for box office profit.

"It's a lot of factors for any movie to get made," says Tim Miller, the helmer that's finally brought the merc with a mouth to the screen. "A lot of stars have to align. If you look at five years ago there was a different regime at Fox. There was a different expectation from the audience for superheroes. They hadn't seen as many superhero films as they have now and they weren't ready for something different because they weren't tired of what they had."

Miller was initially signed to direct in 2011. "The thought back then was, 'Why do something new when the PG-13 model works so well? Why spend our money on something that's edgy?' Now, five years later, everyone's going, 'Hey, it's time for something different.' *Guardians Of The Galaxy* proved that they were ready for something different."

FAN POWER

For once we can thank the massed legions of the internet. In 2014 test FX footage for Miller's never-made movie leaked onto the world's servers. The positive fan reaction to this proof-of-concept sequence finally persuaded Fox to give the greenlight.

"It proved in a verifiable way all those emails I sent that said, 'Hey, people really love this character!' were true," laughs Miller, on the line to *SFX* from Santa Monica, three months ahead of the film's release. "And then [producer] Simon Kinberg came on board and blessed it because he's really the gatekeeper for Marvel properties at Fox. He said, 'This project's cool, and Tim doesn't seem like a complete idiot, so maybe we should give it a try...'

One constant in the film's crawl to the screen has been star Ryan Reynolds, who played the disfigured rogue in *Wolverine* but remained committed to one day delivering a truer take to the character's fans.

"Ryan was on board from day one. He sat down with the writers right after Fox greenlit the script. His DNA is all over the movie. If you look at other Hollywood leading men, where are you going to find the combination of



Ajax: so much more than Spray 'n' Wipe.



Our guy gets close up with Negasonic Teenage Warhead (Brianna Hildebrand).



Mask-free director Tim Miller with his mask-free star.



> "RYAN WAS ON BOARD FROM DAY ONE. HIS DNA IS ALL OVER THE MOVIE"

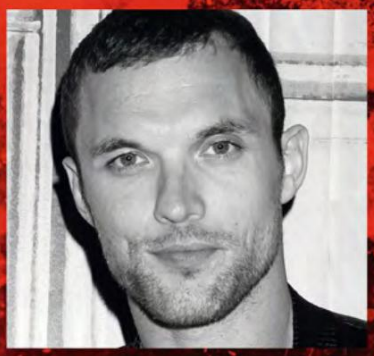
athleticism, beauty – he's an excellent looking man – and comedy that this guy's got? And the comedy is the clincher. He's an amazing actor but he's so fucking funny. His personality in real life is very close to Deadpool in the film. It's just the kind of guy he is."

Reynolds played a rival studio's superhero in 2011 but Miller remained loyal to his leading man. "The question was well, if he's going to be Green Lantern, is there anyone else who can play Deadpool? And I said no, there's nobody else. Nobody else can play Deadpool. It would have been a very different movie if he hadn't been involved. He was pushing it every second."

Given fandom won the greenlight for this film, you wonder if Miller felt locked into a compact with the Deadpool hardcore, compelled to deliver the most faithful take imaginable.

"I always felt that way, regardless of them giving permission," he shares. "I wouldn't say I'm a Hollywood insider, so I've always looked at the films that they do [from a fan perspective]. You can see that they take a property and do things to it that you can only do if you don't understand the property and don't care about it. Personally I fall in love with characters and stories for a reason, and then when you translate them to the big screen, to throw away all of those things that made it great just makes no fucking sense to me. As a studio executive, why would you think that you know better than 20 years of fans' love for a character? Maybe 90% of the audience won't get angry because they don't know the difference but it does hurt the movie and the →

GETTY (1)



HIT THE ROAD, AJAX

Rising Brit star Ed Skrein is Deadpool's nemesis

What does Ajax bring to this story?

When it comes to my parts the movie just kind of slows down, it becomes grounded, it gets a lot darker. It's a very different dynamic when it's Ajax time. It's the dark and the light, the yin and the yang. Hopefully I'm complementing Deadpool's lightness and making him seem even funnier. And hopefully his lightness is making me seem even darker.

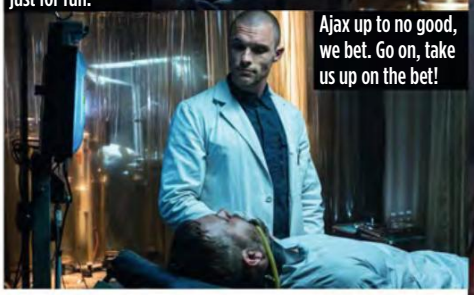
The film has a self-aware tone. Was that easy for you to lock into?

We're constantly making references to modern pop culture in real life, aren't we, and quoting things from series and movies and stuff like that. It's a bit more real to be referencing modern pop culture and being a bit meta than never referencing it because you're afraid if you mention Justin Bieber then you step out of the world of Marvel. The wonderful thing about the Marvel universe is that it's based in reality but with that wonderful element of fantasy. And *Deadpool* has that dynamic.

It's a film that has an unflinching approach to violence. Was that a concern for you?

It is something that I think about. I've got a young son. I want him to know the realities of violence. There's really no positive side to the reality of violence. But there is a positive side when you're playfighting. It's the best way ever to be violent, in a safely controlled environment on a film set. But I don't want people to think that violence is something that comes without negative connotations. From the beginning we were conscious that there had to be consequences. If someone gets hit in the face their eye's going to be black. If someone gets smashed in their jaw they're going to break their jaw. There's always a negative side, even for the "winner". **Nick Setchfield**


Wade Wilson isn't wearing that mask just for fun.


Ajax up to no good, we bet. Go on, take us up on the bet!


Copycat (Morena Baccarin): one of many women in Deadpool's life.

Angel Dust (Gina Carano) can kick you in the Morlocks.

character in my mind. I've always felt like I have a responsibility to the character and the lore of the character."

KEEPING THE LOOK

The movie's fidelity to its source material can be seen in Deadpool's costume, one of the most accurate translations of a comic book outfit the screen has seen. How important was it for Miller to honour Rob Liefeld's classic design?

"I didn't really think about it. I just did it. I always liked Deadpool's design and when we set out to design the costume there was just no question in my mind that it had to be true to the comics because I liked the comics. I happen to be a friend of Rob's so I certainly feel a certain obligation to make him happy, but mostly I just like the costume."

And Miller had no qualms about burying his star's face behind that iconic scarlet and black mask.

"For any of the shots that matter, such as a medium close-up, we recorded Ryan without the mask, saying the same things he's saying with the mask, and we're doing some CG enhancement," the director reveals. "Most of it's to the eyes – they're the most expressive part. It's subtle, so it's never overwhelmingly comedic or cartoony but man, those shots are starting to come in now and it just adds a whole other dimension to the character. We certainly lose a lot but Ryan's so expressive in the way his body moves and the way his voice is that he only needed a little bit of help with the face to bring it home."

The film also preserves the knowing, self-aware vibe of the comics. "We have quite a lot of fourth wall breaks, and we use them to comment on moviemaking and the superhero genre. We occasionally use the fourth wall to comment on Ryan, and Ryan's life, and Ryan playing a superhero in a movie. My rule was when he's Wade Wilson he can't break the fourth wall. Only when he becomes Deadpool."

A leading VFX artist and animator, Miller's a first-time feature helmer. In spite of his inexperience he says Twentieth Century Fox allowed him to deliver the quirky, ballsy movie he knew the character demanded.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME? Deadpool's not the only one to break the fourth wall!



JAMES BOND

→ George Lazenby's 007 lamented "This never happened to the other fella" in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.



BUFFY

→ "Miss me?" asked Sunnydale's queen of slayage, just before the titles rolled in season two opener "When She Was Bad".



DOCTOR WHO

→ William Hartnell's Time Lord toasted "A happy Christmas to all of you at home!" in festive '60s episode "The Feast Of Steven".



ANIMAL MAN

→ Grant Morrison tripped out comic book readers by having his hero cry "I can see you!" in a moment of existential revelation.



DAMIEN

→ Classic horror *The Omen* ends with the devil's spawn smiling creepily at the camera. Pure nightmare fuel.



SHE-HULK

→ Marvel's emerald Amazon is so self-aware she can rip through actual comic book pages. Make mine meta!





Colossus may be CG, Deadpool, but he can punch very, very hard.

> "THE MOVIE IS SO STRANGE THAT YOU JUST HAVE TO ACCEPT WHAT IT IS"

"The studio really didn't question anything," he tells *SFX*. "The movie is so strange that you just have to accept what it is. Questioning one ingredient in the soup felt wrong, I think. So they said, 'Look, you guys understand this, go make it great – we trust you.' I wouldn't say they trusted me – they trusted Simon [laughs]! But because Simon trusted me we really had no interference."

TESTING THE LIMITS

Deadpool's hard R rating ensures the film has licence to scatter gore and F-bombs galore. But just how far can a film that's officially part of Fox's X-Men franchise push the boundaries?

"Here's the thing," says Miller. "You say we're pushing the boundaries and I guess we are – I just don't really feel like we are. You see a movie like *Saw* and I know how horrible and uncomfortable that shit makes me feel. I don't even want to watch it. Or you see those movies where you have a guy getting cut in half, right in front of the camera, with his sides splitting open and guts spilling out... we don't have any of that kind of shit. I don't feel like we're even close to that. Or you watch a comedian roast on Comedy Central and just how fucking nasty the comedy is, how mean and just disgusting it is... we're not anywhere near that.

"I want to be edgy and I want to push the audience but I don't want to leave them behind. I want people beyond the hardcore fans, because that's a rather small number in relation to the population. I want the fans to feel like they got exactly what they wanted but I don't want to exclude the rest of the movie-watching audience. Not just because hey, I'd like it to be a hit so we can make another – which is true – but more because I want people to enjoy the film and I don't want half the audience sitting there going, 'Shit, I don't feel so good...' [laughs].

"It's a careful line," Miller insists. "We're editing a scene right now that I think rides that edge. I'm the one pushing it, saying, 'No, no, no, let's not cut shots! It's amazing!' And everybody else is going, 'Well, no, it's making people uncomfortable...' So we'll cut back to a spot that still feels really powerful but also doesn't throw people out of the movie wholesale. There's a certain percentage that are going to be offended and aren't going to like the movie. There's nothing I can do about that!"

And, Miller tells *SFX*, never underestimate the romantic appeal of attitudinal assassins and full-throttle ultraviolence.

"If you look at what's special about *Deadpool* it's exactly what would make it appeal to a broader audience. If it was an R-rated Punisher film I would go, 'Oh, okay, maybe the extreme violence is more niche and it doesn't have a chance of breaking out...' But with Deadpool there's humour and humour really translates well. There a lot of women on Valentine's Day who might not ordinarily see a film like *Deadpool* but because it's funny and because it's got a love story they may be tempted to go into the theatre, whereas if it was Punisher it would be an exercise in appeasement..."

Wait. *Deadpool*'s a date flick?

Miller laughs. "It is! Seriously. It does have a really strong love story..."

Deadpool opens on 10 February.



HEAVY METAL

Director Tim Miller talks Colossus, *Deadpool*'s X-Man-in-residence

Does Colossus feel like connective tissue to the bigger X-Men universe?

I know it probably looks strategic – and maybe it was. I never asked Rhett [Reese] and Paul [Wernick – the writers] if they did that because they wanted to associate themselves with the larger X-Men franchise. In the comics Deadpool generally moves through the world of the X-Men, mutants and so on, so he's kind of in that world naturally. I figured they originally chose Colossus because he's the perfect straight man. Even in the comics he's always this morally upright, squeaky clean sort of a guy, and that makes him the perfect foil for Deadpool.

Was he an effects challenge?

He's CG all the time in the movie. He's never human. So yeah, he's a huge effects challenge. He's probably one of the biggest parts of the visual effects budget. And it was always written that way, that he was a big metal guy the whole time. In my mind I really wanted to see Colossus the way he is in the comics, which is a behemoth of metal that's just this giant powerhouse. He had to be huge and there was no way we were going to do that with the real actor.

WENTWORTH MILLER

We chill out with the DC Universe's coolest character

Words by Joseph McCabe /// Photography by Chiun-Kai Shih

Few actors have been so well cast in superhero comic book adaptations as Wentworth Miller, who's brought the dry, laconic delivery he perfected on such projects as TV's *Prison Break* and the *Resident Evil* films to the role of Leonard Snart, aka the cunning, methodical supervillain Captain Cold, arch-enemy of the title hero in Warner Bros's hit series *The Flash*. It's no wonder then that Miller has landed a lead role in the DC spin-off series *Legends Of Tomorrow*. Co-starring *Prison Break* buddy Dominic Purcell as Snart's partner, the hot-tempered Heat Wave, the show brings together a handful of the DC TV Universe's finest in the company's first ever live-action series devoted to a team of heroes and antiheroes. As Miller reveals, Snart, like the actor who plays him, brings an unbridled love for his job to his latest project...

How easy is it for Captain Cold to fit into the Legends of Tomorrow team?

My hope is that it's not easy at all. I hope there's lots of conflict and fireworks. I think Captain Cold is used to calling the shots and used to being *the* guy and now that has to change. And I think that will be a problem for him, and therein is hopefully some great drama.

So Snart won't get along with his teammates?

It is a bunch of heroes and villains who have to work together toward a common goal, which is to take on this sort of mega-villain [Vandal Savage]. But that doesn't mean they're gonna be a happy family en route. As an audience member, I don't want to tune in to watch a show where everybody's getting along. It doesn't sound particularly interesting to me. So I think the purpose of Snart and Heat Wave and Caity's character [White Canary] is to keep things edgy and interesting.

What's it like having your own action figures?

It's extraordinary. A friend of mine, when she saw the Funko Pop! doll, said, "Don't you think it's kind of weird that you don't have a mouth?" I said, "Who needs a mouth when you've got that sweet ass widow's peak going on?"

Is being a lead on this show going to keep you away from screenwriting?

Potentially. I'm not a multi-tasker. It was all about writing, and now it's all about acting, and that's fine by me. When I was not acting, I began to miss being on set and enjoying the kind of community that only happens on a film and TV set. There's something kind of pure and satisfying about showing up, memorising your lines, and bringing a character to life using someone else's words and ideas.

Is Snart ever going to question the path he's taken? Is he ever going to say, "I should've been a superhero"?

He's got his pride and I think he does what he does well, and there are reasons why he does what he does. But I don't see him ever becoming a full-on good guy. I think he does have a code, which the other characters potentially speak to. I think we've seen the Flash trying to speak to Snart's sense of honour, such as it is. But my hope is that he stays a baddie even though he's pursuing a positive goal.

Will he someday get another costume? Or will it remain the parka?

I like the parka. It works for me. Except when it's August in Vancouver and we're shooting outside.

Snart has been kind of a brother's keeper to Heat Wave. Does that relationship continue in *Legends Of Tomorrow*?

I feel like Captain Cold is, at this point, the one person that Heat Wave potentially listens to. Some of the time. Heat Wave, I think though, is a full-on baddie. I'm not sure if there's anything redeeming there. Maybe I'll be surprised. As Snart slowly, perhaps inevitably, moves toward a more heroic aspect, I think his relationship with Heat Wave could become more problematic because I don't see Heat Wave taking the same journey.

Working with Dominic Purcell, are the choices you make as actors informed by your shared history, by the fact that there was a chemistry before this project?

Yeah, I think our characters, Captain Cold and Heat Wave, were meant to have history, were meant to feel kind of like brothers who are getting along and not getting along at the same time. Dominic and I have that by virtue of our history as actors, which I think adds another layer of juice to the script and the scenes.

Do you hope to continue appearing on *The Flash*? Or is that chapter of Snart's career finished?

No, no, no. I'd be really disappointed if I had to hand in Captain Cold's relationship with Barry Allen. Because I think there's a lot more there to explore. So my commitment is to do both, if they'll let me.

Legends Of Tomorrow is on The CW in the US. It will air on Sky 1 in the UK.

Biodata

Occupation
→ Actor
Born
→ 2 June 1972
From
→ Chipping Norton
Greatest hits
→ *Dinotopia, Underworld, Prison Break, Resident Evil: Afterlife, Resident Evil: Retribution, The Flash*
Random fact
→ In addition to starring in hit genre projects, Miller writes them – having penned *Stoker* in 2013's and *The Disappointments Room* this year.

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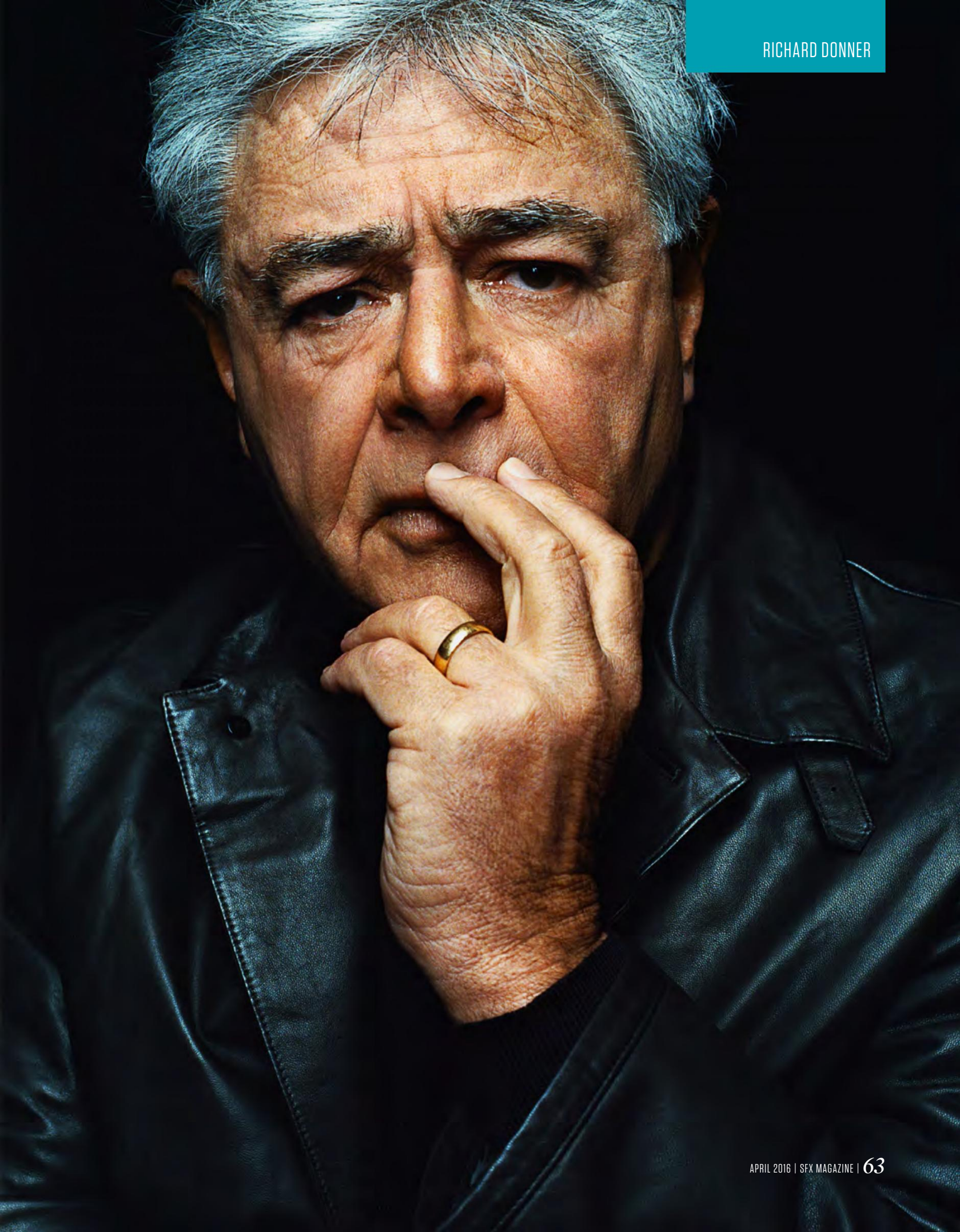
"I DON'T SEE HIM EVER BECOMING A GOOD GUY"

LIFE THROUGH a LENS

In a directing career that spans seven decades, Richard Donner has toiled in every kind of genre from cop flicks to conspiracy thrillers but his best remembered movies are from the worlds of science fiction, fantasy and horror. After cutting his teeth on TV like *The Man From UNCLE* and *The Twilight Zone*, he went on to craft era-defining blockbusters like *The Omen*, *Superman* and *The Goonies* before returning to his roots by producing TV horror anthology *Tales From The Crypt*, inspired by the chilling EC comic books of the 1950s. He even helped launch the current superhero film boom by producing 2000's *X-Men*. Looking back over a career studded with classics, Donner takes *SFX* behind the scenes of some of his finest work... →

From the antichrist to Krypton, director RICHARD DONNER tells Joseph McCabe all about his blockbuster career. Just don't mention Donald Trump...

© JAMES WHITE/CORBIS OUTLINE





Bill remembers he's also forgotten his missus's birthday.



If we were Richard Donner we would have kept that newspaper.

SUPERMAN THE MOVIE (1978)

Red, white and blue. And a bit of yellow.



● It ended up being a turning point of my life. I was brought up on Superman. But when they sent the script to me, I read it, and my first reaction was, "They're destroying an American hero." It was almost a comedy. [Screenwriter] Tom Mankiewicz and I sat down and there were two things we decided it had to be. One was you really had to believe a man can fly. The effects had to be fantastic. The other thing we said was, "It's gotta be a love story. There's gotta be some sort of unrequited love." Because you want to care about these people. We wanted them to have their own humanities. They had a reality and we had to stay within it. It could be funny, but it had to be straight... Superman personifies hope. He's as pure as the day is long, to the extent of being a total square. That's the beauty of it. When I hear Donald Trump talking on television, which I try not to do, I think, "Oh my god. This is the kind of evil that Superman was put on Earth to eliminate!" But Superman's so honest, he'll go on forever and ever and ever.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE: "NIGHTMARE AT 20,000 FEET" (1963)

● The things I remember were the difficulties in making it. We shot those episodes in three days. But on that one, on the afternoon of the second day, they told us we had to finish that day. I said, "You're crazy." We were on a motion picture stage at MGM, and the studio had a feature that wanted that stage because it was an airplane stage. We were told that the following morning they were moving in. We worked all night finishing that show. I mean, literally all night. I think we finished when the sun came up. We had to finish, or we were thrown out... It was a great group of people to work with. It was a challenge, it was fun, it was wonderful. I loved Bill Shatner, I loved the whole cast, and we had a good time making it.

THE OMEN (1976)

● That was a "mystery-suspense thriller" [laughs]. I'll tell you something – if it was a horror film, I couldn't have gotten it made. Because nobody wanted to make a horror film. But it was pitched to Fox producer Alan Ladd by me – he was the head of the studio, a great guy – that we wanted to make a mystery-suspense thriller. He read it, and he said, "You got the go." We never would have got Gregory Peck if we'd said, "This is a horror film." So we treated it like, "How could all these things ever happen to anybody in one day? It had to be insanity." That's how we got it made.

THE OMEN

MY FAVOURITE SHOT

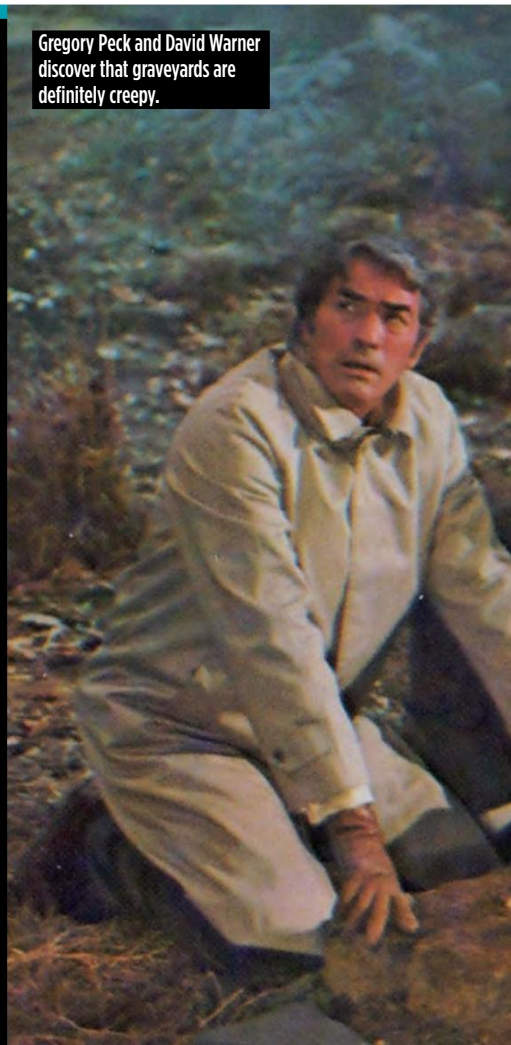
Lee Remick falls from a balcony... It was a very low-budget film, so everything we did we prepared well in advance. We were going to put her in a body harness attached to a crane. But she said, "My husband is an assistant director and he said none of these things are foolproof. I'm not doing it." I said, "It shoots tomorrow!" John Richards, the special effects guy, said, "There's something I've always wanted to try..." We ended up putting the floor on the wall. We put Lee on a dolly on the floor in front of the camera, and the dolly had a little turntable. She starts with her face right up against the lens. As we dolly her away she flails her arms and we turn the turntable so it goes right up against the wall. As it stops — bang! — we cut to the real floor. We did the last three-inch drop of her face, because she was in the foreground.







Gregory Peck and David Warner discover that graveyards are definitely creepy.



REX (6), GETTY (1)



Supes negotiates the invisible door knocker.

SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE

MY FAVOURITE SHOT

Superman takes Lois Lane flying. Then he lands her on her balcony and flies off. She makes her way to the interior of her apartment, opens the door, and there's Clark Kent... It took us a month to figure out how to do it. After they separate, we hold on Lois for a minute, she starts to walk, but she kind of stops. There's a slight blur. That was a separate piece of film, over her shoulder, of him flying away and her starting to walk. Instead of a background, we had a projection screen and a front projector. We projected on that screen Superman flying away. We dollied our camera and followed Lois inside, where Christopher Reeve was waiting, in a totally different outfit — because it was a month later. It's easy to draw it up, but it was a fucking feat. We had a great director of photography, Geoffrey Unsworth... I miss all that stuff. I miss the challenge of making movies.





No Damien, arms *out* if you want to imitate one of those gravestone crosses.

"We never would have got Gregory Peck if we'd said, 'This is a horror film'"

LADYHAWKE (1985)

Michelle Pfeiffer was in California, and I was in Italy, preparing sets. Her agent got her to do an introduction of herself on videotape and sent it over. At the end of it – this beautiful, beautiful woman – her hand comes in from out of frame and she has this little canary on her finger. She says, "I want you to meet Ladyhawke." It was just charming, so well thought out. That really swung me. I wanted Rutger [Hauer] to play the heavy. We met with him and he said, "It's a wonderful role. But I don't want to play any more heavies right now. I'd love to play [hero] Navarre." Then we had another actor. He came over to Italy, and we talked. We were ready, we were all set. He happened to be very much in love with somebody at the time and he didn't want to be away from her, and he really wanted to get out of the picture. Lauren [Schuler Donner] – who was not my wife at the time, who was my producer (who I was in love with, though she didn't know it) – said, "What about Rutger?" He came over and was wonderful in the role. It was kind of kismet. →



"Ring a ring o' roses..."



Spot the Goonie with an interest in camouflage.

THE GOONIES (1985)

I liked Steven Spielberg a lot. He was an acquaintance. I got a call from him one day, and he said, "I got this screenplay I want you to read." I said, "Oh, swell." I got the screenplay and I started reading it, and I said, "Wait a minute. This is a Steven Spielberg movie. Why isn't he doing this?" I had never worked with a lot with kids. So I called him and I said, "Why aren't you doing this?" He said, "I have a project that I'm going to start and I want to get it done soon. I always remember you as being as big a kid as I am. I think you'd be perfect for it." It turned out to be a tough relationship to get started on, but as it did get going I was so in love with those kids... I never thought it possible. It was all Steven. If he had said anything else, I probably would have figured, "Maybe the script's really not good and I'm reading it wrong." I was very defensive [laughs]. But it turned out to be one of the great delights of my life.



Tom Hanks in *Tales From The Crypt* (not *Sleepless In Seattle 2*).

KOBAL (2), REX (1)

SCROOGED (1988)

I got a call from my agent, who said, "Read this script. Bill Murray's committed to it." I thought it had great possibilities, but I wasn't sure. My agent called back and said, "Bill Murray wants to meet you. He'll be at your house around nine o'clock." I said, "Okay..." It's nine o'clock, nine-thirty, ten o'clock, ten-thirty... No, Bill Murray. I said, "Fuck this." Just as I'm about to go to bed the gate bell rings. It's Bill. He said, "I gotta see ya. Let me in, please." I let him in and he just started talking about everything that had nothing to do with the screenplay. Like there wasn't even a movie. He was totally charming and funny and delightful. We had a couple of drinks and a hit on a joint or something. He said, "Where's Lauren?" I said, "She's sleeping." I went to the bathroom and the next thing I hear is Lauren yelling upstairs. Bill had gone upstairs to the bedroom to wake her up... I just fell in love with this crazy guy. It was like that making the movie. He was just an amazing, talented genius, for whom stuff came out of nowhere.



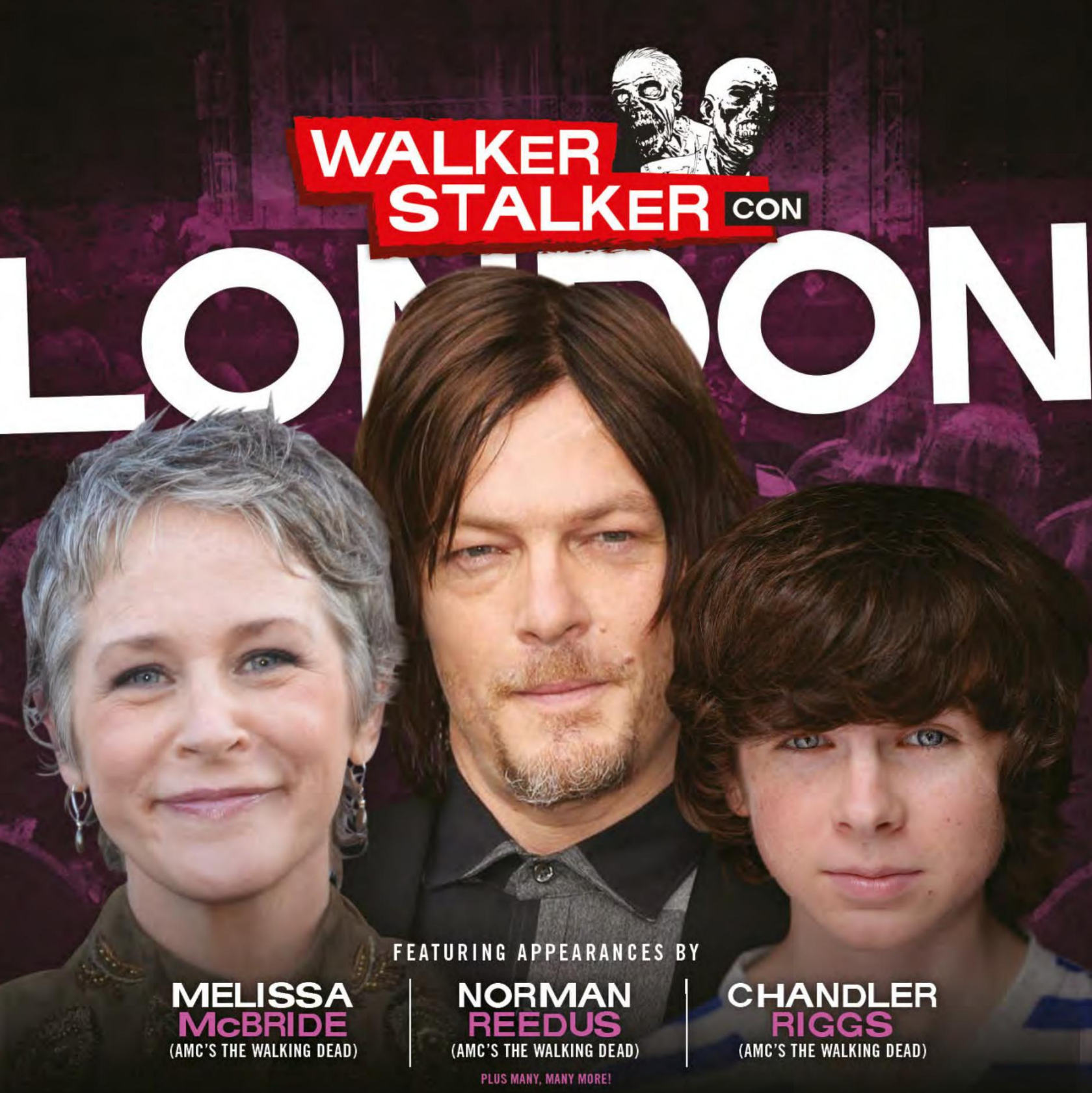
Bill Murray won't be hearing no Christmas Carol like that.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT (1989-1996)

I was working with a producer and he had the rights to *Tales From The Crypt*. It was about to expire and he didn't have the money to pick it up. I said, "I love *Tales From The Crypt*!" Making it a series was very exciting, for no other reason than it was a project that should get made and I was fortunate enough to be in a position to see it happen... I think that was a brilliant series of comics – I wouldn't even call them comic books – of short stories. Lo and behold, again, we were totally lucky.

X-MEN (2000)

I knew of the X-Men, obviously, but I'd never realised their potential. It was my wife's project. The only thing I helped do was pitch it. Lauren made that series on her own with our company. I take no credit for it whatsoever. But I love and respect Bryan Singer tremendously. He's a bright, totally off-the-wall, wonderful character.



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DAYS OF

ON SET!



THE DEAD



Madness awaits as season six of THE WALKING DEAD approaches its terrifying conclusion... Joseph McCabe braves the set and discovers there are momentous changes to come


We wouldn't be surprised if this look turned up on catwalks.

Just as we thought *The Walking Dead* had no more screws left to tighten, the zombie apocalypse epic has, in its sixth year, taken its thrills to the next level by reinventing the screw entirely. After Glenn was believed killed by a horde of walkers, and almost made it back to the now pregnant Maggie and their new home in Alexandria, we saw the town overrun by the undead. After Daryl had reunited with Abraham and Sasha, we saw the three of them taken prisoner by new enemies. And after Carol and Morgan battled over the homicidal, captive Wolf, we saw said Wolf escape with the town's new physician, Denise, as his prisoner. What fate awaits our heroes when they return for the season's remaining eight episodes?

When *SFX* visits *The Walking Dead*'s set in Senoia, Georgia, we immediately notice that the group is once more separated. Maggie (Lauren Cohan) and Carol (Melissa McBride) are in the woods and on the run, running into new enemies who've thrown jackets over their heads and kidnapped them. Could they be working with the nefarious Negan (newly cast Jeffrey Dean Morgan), arguably the most sadistic villain featured in Robert Kirkman's comic book? As per usual on the show's set, mum's the word. But we do our best to pry some info out of executive producer/director/zombie make-up effects maestro Greg Nicotero when we catch up with him on the phone a few months later.

"I can definitely say that the theme and the storyline that we set up in the first half of the season is gonna dramatically shift in the second half of the season," reveals Nicotero. "We set up this great zombie horror threat, and we've established that Alexandria has been invaded. In the second half of the season... things change. The show again takes another direction. I can tell you I'm in the middle of editing the finale right now, and the most exciting thing about it is I feel like the show is morphing as it's done in the past. Going from the Governor to Terminus and then Gabriel's people, the show transitions. I think we're on the precipice of seeing probably the most dramatic shift thematically in the show, that will come about in the second half of the season.

"It's tremendously exciting for us, because it's season six. We agonise over keeping the show fresh by challenging our audience. In the first episode [of this season] alone, we were shooting scenes out of sequence, and shooting in black and white. And giving the audience little clues of what the mission was before we realised that the zombie horde was escaping from the quarry. Those are all good things because we respect our audience and we want them to go on this ride with us. So in the second half of the season there are new characters that will be introduced and some new themes and storylines. It's a really exciting time for us. I can tell you that the mood on set during the filming of the last episode could not have been more positive from every actor. Reading the script, rushing what I was shooting, the way the story was unfolding, and the promise of a new world, that's very exciting."

TEMPER, TEMPER

And what of Negan? Given that every word out of his mouth in Robert Kirkman's comic book is the f-bomb, will the character be tempered when he makes his long-awaited screen debut?

"It's interesting," says Nicotero. "One way you could look at Negan is, he's not necessarily a bad guy. It's just these are the rules that he has set up. Just like our group has set up rules. Just like the people at Terminus had rules and


"Hi. I'll be your server for the evening."


Even worse than doing the London Marathon?


Let's hope there are none on the next floor.

> **We agonise over keeping the show fresh by challenging our audience**

the Governor had rules. Everybody has their rules to live by. And anytime you introduce a new group or a new group of people, like the Alexandrians, you get an insight as to how they survive. With Negan's character, from the comic book, he has a set of rules that he lives by, and that's how he's survived so long."

KILLING FOR A REASON

With Morgan's captive Wolf — the biggest source of discontent between him and Carol — now on the run, has the Aikido master's ongoing argument with the widow Peletier settled down for the moment or will the two continue to butt heads?

"For sure," says Nicotero. "What we've always established with Carol is she doesn't get satisfaction out of killing. She does it completely out of necessity. If somebody threatens her way of life. She won't hesitate. That doesn't mean she enjoys it. But her perspective of valuing life is very different than Morgan's — who says all life is precious. And Carol's like, 'Um... no. All life isn't precious. If you have people that breached our world, and are hacking people to pieces in the street, there's no reason why we would ever want those people to be protected.' I think that philosophical viewpoint is very volatile, and I don't see Carol wavering from that and I don't see Morgan wavering from that."

"Until something is resolved it tends to continue," warns Nicotero's fellow executive producer Gale Anne Hurd. "I think that they both had an impact on each other. They are people who though their own personal life experiences came to be who they were. We've seen those arcs. We've seen why. Which we try to do with so many of our characters, to understand how they became who they are. They're two characters who've become so much the polar opposite of where they started. In Morgan's case, it's a 360 — he's come back, and, even more so than the character who first encountered Rick when Rick woke from his coma, he's someone who values life again. Carol is someone who really questions whether anyone can be trusted, except for the people who've proven themselves. In essence, they're both right. But they live in a world that's intolerant of people who can't change to deal with the circumstances they're facing." →

THE WALKING DEAD GUIDE TO SURVIVING A ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Cast and crew share pro-tips on staying alive in a Walker-infested world!

NORMAN REEDUS (Daryl Dixon)

Make friends. I think you're definitely safer in a group than you are by yourself. There's definitely safety in numbers.



GREG NICTOTERO

(Executive Producer/Special Effects Make-up)

Everyone's like, "Where would you go?" You gotta go somewhere where no one else will go, so go to your dentist. Or go to my shop [laughs]. Go to my shop in Los Angeles and I'll make you up as a zombie, and you'll be fine. Because you'll look just like the zombies. The zombies will go, "Eh, fuck it..."



DENISE HUTH (Co-Executive Producer)

Weapons are a good thing to have, and it's good to stockpile food. You need water, you need guns, and you need other people. Don't try to do it on your own, or you'll go crazy for sure. That's the key to the survival of our characters — they didn't know each other before it started but they would die for each other, and that's how they've all stayed alive.

DARRELL PRITCHETT (Special Effects Supervisor)

Find a place to hide. And get your hands on a case of dynamite.

GALE ANNE HURD (Executive Producer)

My personal advice is if you become allies with someone like our core group of survivors — whether it's Carol or Rick or Michonne or Abraham or Daryl, even Maggie and Glenn — you're in pretty good hands. It really is about forming a community you can trust in order to survive. Pick the right friends.



LAUREN COHAN (Maggie Greene)

Just want it. Just want to live. Just want it enough that you'll do what you need to do. If it was really the end of the world... When we first started the show, I used to think, "Well, alright, if it's over, it's over. Just go do something that you enjoy for a few minutes, then say bye-bye." Now I'm like, "Screw that shit. I am not going without a fight." You know what to do, we all know what to do.

> **“Daryl feels a fight coming and a storm coming, and he’s ready”**

Of course, both characters have proven their ability to change to some extent, with Carol evolving from battered housewife to warrior woman. A testament, says Nicotero, to McBride’s formidable skills...

“Melissa’s an astonishing actress. Not a lot of people know that when we were shooting season three, in the episode where T-Dog died, there was a moment where Carol was going to die in lieu of T-Dog’s character. At that point there was some concern in the writers’ room that they didn’t know where to take her character. So the fact that [showrunner] Scott Gimple and the writers have been able to craft this amazing journey for her just goes to show that there is a tremendous amount of story to tell for a lot of these characters. We’re just hitting the surface.”

One such character whose surface remains largely unscratched, despite his gruff exterior, is fan-fave Daryl Dixon as played by the perennially popular Norman Reedus. When we last saw the redneck bowman it looked like he, Abraham and Sasha were about to be put in the one environment one should never place a wild animal... A cage.

“The cavalry’s a little split up at the moment,” says Reedus. “So at different times different people come and help each other out, but we’re all split up.

“Abraham is such a good character,” adds Reedus of Daryl’s new partner, “and he’s such an important team member to our group. He’s got military experience. He’s a straight shooter and he’s tough and he’s a badass. So it’s good to have that guy on our team. Sasha, she’s a badass as well. Daryl feels pretty safe around those two, you know what I mean? But Daryl’s such a loner in so many ways. Those two are doing their own thing now and Daryl’s doing his own thing. That group is very conflicted, but it has each other’s backs.”

UP FOR A SCRAP

“I mean,” Reedus continues, “Daryl’s pissed that somebody took his crossbow. He’s very upset about that. He knows that there’s probably gonna be repercussions for both that and the fact that other people know about them now. I think he’s getting ready to fight. I think he feels a fight coming and a storm coming, and he’s getting ready to do that.”

“We’ve got two groups in very precarious situations,” continues Hurd. “The people that you’d typically see come to the rescue are in a pretty dangerous situation themselves. You’ve got people who’ve had more time to prepare for the situation, who are probably quite capable. But given that they’re outnumbered and sort of taken by surprise, they don’t have a plan A and a plan B. So they are vulnerable in a way we haven’t seen them vulnerable before.”

“There’s a lot of barely making it out of this and not making it out of that,” Reedus teases of what’s to come. “It’s just non-stop action from here on out.”

The Walking Dead returns to Fox in the UK on 15 February, the day after its US debut on AMC.



Any extras reading? Try and spot yourself!

GO GREENE!

LAUREN COHAN on the mettle of Maggie Greene...



In its sixth year how has your relationship with the show changed?
→ I get these strange pockets of nostalgia for when the show was smaller, when there were just a couple of us. I started in season two but that still feels like a long, long time ago. But so many things have not changed. I mean there’s been so much consistency with the union we have. We’ve all talked about how close we are as a cast, and that just never, never falters. We’re just very, very tight-knit, and very much in line with how we want to tell the story, and how we want to keep this environment real.

We’ve heard there’s a lot more action in the second half of this season.
→ To have this scale of action happening... It’s much more like an action movie within the very real world of these very tested, struggling characters. Yeah, it’s sort of like an absolute explosion. It’s a battle.

What are the biggest differences between Maggie in season six and Maggie a couple of seasons ago?
→ There’s been a really slow stepping into what you need in this world, in my mind, for her. The most monumental changes happen for her this season. It’s hard for me to speak to that right now, but it’s been exciting to play because that’s been just a metamorphosis. The funny thing that comes up through this season is the justifications that you make to protect your own and how that moral compass wavers sometimes, depending on the situation. It’s been so beautifully barbaric, actually, because like every year, you have that war between your mind and what the gut wants, which is survival and to protect your family and the people you love.

GETTY (1)

THE UNDEAD

THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS

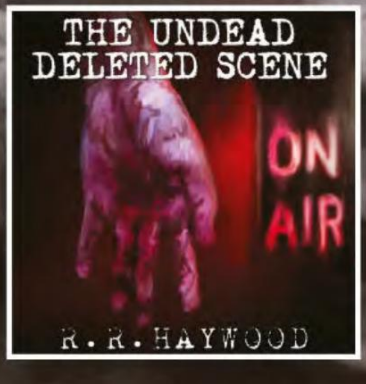
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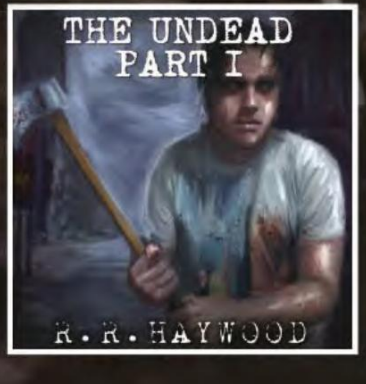
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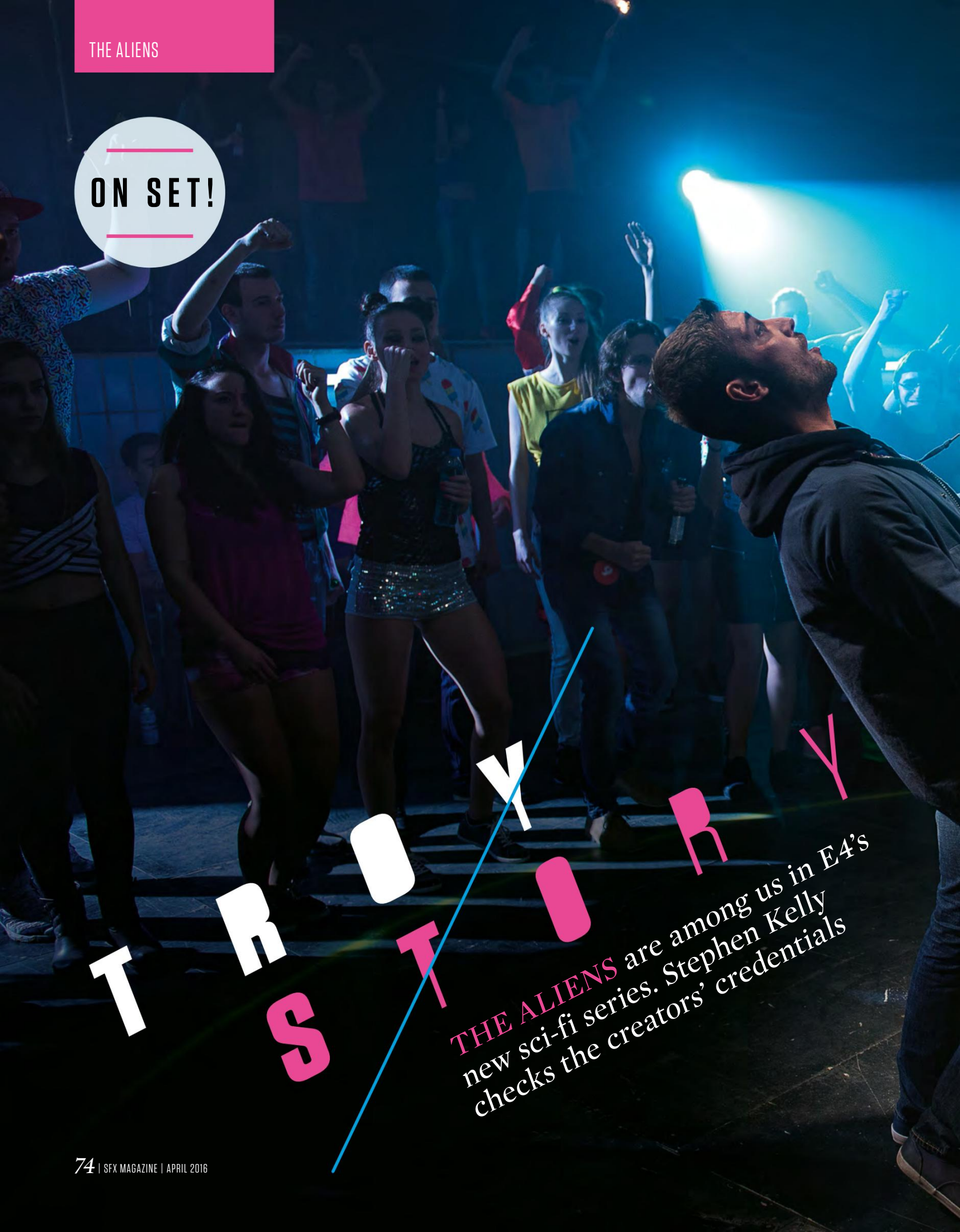
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ON SET!



TROY STORY

THE ALIENS are among us in E4's new sci-fi series. Stephen Kelly checks the creators' credentials





Jim Howick, Michael Socha and Michaela Coel step onto the streets of fire.



Ashley Walters has a knife. A big knife.



Looks like such a nice chap.

According to Greek mythology, the great walls of Troy were strong enough to withstand a 10-year siege. But what if instead of keeping invaders out, those walls were trapping people inside? And what if those people weren't actually people at all? Such is *The Aliens*, the new comedy-drama from E4 that reimagines Britain as a country of segregation: where extraterrestrials, 40 years after crashing off the coast of North Wales, have been swept away to "Troy", a grim, walled-off slum that is set in the UK, but is being filmed today in Sofia, Bulgaria.

"There was excitement when they crashed here and then there was mass-disillusion," says Fintan Ryan, the show's writer. "For a time, they were allowed to go wherever they wanted, but wherever they went there would be trouble. They're built for crime, you see – their DNA isn't traceable, their hair is smokable. So then they get concentrated into one spot because the Home Secretary says, 'This is crazy, there's crime wherever they go.' So the big question is: are they victims of prejudice or are they just like that?"

The idea for the show originally came from Clerkenwell Films' Petra Fried and Matt Jarvis, executive producers of E4's fellow sci-fi comedy-drama *Misfits*. "We were looking for another contemporary, British spin on genre," says Jarvis, "and we thought that there was lots of alien mythology in popular culture to play with, especially the idea of 'aliens living among us'."

EXTRATERRESTRIAL MISFITS

Pitching the show as more dramatic than *Misfits* – "a 'drama-with-funny-bits'" – they approached Ryan, an Irish writer whose TV credits include *Hustle*, *Rev* and *In The Flesh*. "They came to me with the idea of aliens and a guard who works on the border between the human and alien worlds. I think we both had an idea in our heads of Toontown in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. That thing where you go to a place where it's completely different."

For some, the more obvious comparison is *District 9*, the 2009 feature film debut of director Neill Blomkamp. It also depicts aliens stranded on Earth, forced to live in the shanty towns of Johannesburg – Blomkamp's take on South African apartheid.

"In *District 9* there's a massive ghetto with aliens and in *The Aliens* there is a massive ghetto with aliens – I can't deny that. But I didn't actively think, 'We have to make it different to *District 9*', because it is completely different. In [*The Aliens*], it's almost a joke that they're the same as us. It's not about difference or differentiation."

According to Ryan, *The Aliens* is perhaps not the bleeding heart allegory that you might expect, insisting that the show's timely parallel to immigration and refugees sells short an unflinching take on prejudice.

> **"We were keen that the show felt very grounded in reality"**

"The conceit in the show is that there's this massive unquestioned prejudice against aliens. We even ended up not writing a liberal voice for the human side – even a low-level apologetic for them. Lewis [the protagonist played by Michael Socha] is more that guy.

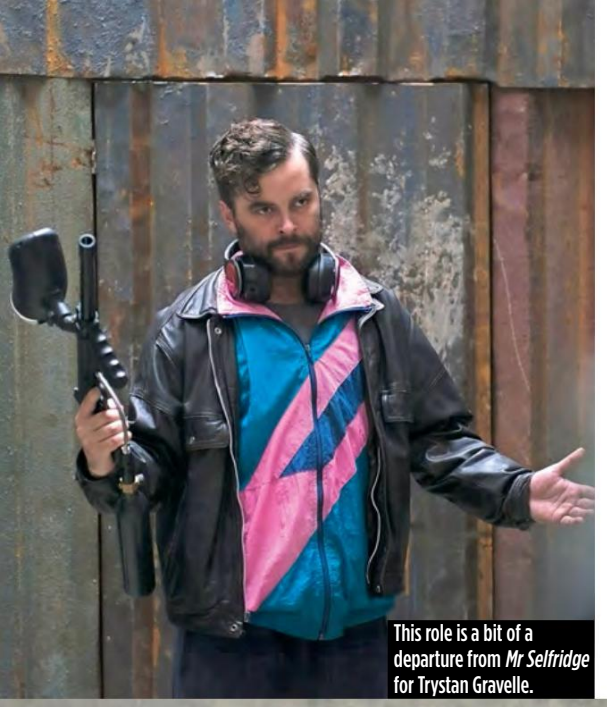
"The idea was that you owed them nothing because they came from somewhere else. You don't owe them the British Empire, or the fact that they're humans just like you and me. They can be objects of everyone's prejudice, and they behave disgracefully in return. It's the thing that we keep doing in order not to make it any kind of polemic. They're not victim-victims. It's supposed to be about if you had a group that were subject to the ultimate level of prejudice, what would happen?"

The answer is desperation – and crime. For *The Aliens* is less concerned with the wider issues, and instead roots its story in the self-contained community of Troy, a world within a world that – as *SFX* sees on set today – is not just dirty and poor but alive, vibrant and odd. "Despite its dark underbelly, it feels like an exciting place to escape to," says Jarvis, who cites references such as *Blade Runner* and *Gomorrah*. Taking their nickname from '70s alien sitcom *Mork & Mindy*, today the streets are lined with "morks" in shell-suits, getting high off of dishwasher tablets, walking past make-shift tents and stalls selling second-hand scrap. And there's hair everywhere – Troy's most valuable export.

"There's a drug lord [Fabien, played by Trystan Gravelle] in charge," says Ryan. "Because the aliens' hair, if humans smoke it, is a drug. So there's an industry of selling hair and getting that out [to humans] by smuggling it across a checkpoint. It's a system of crime. Some people go to work on the human side – low-paid, of course. They can't sell their hair because it gets sprayed at check point. There's also an entertainment industry within Troy which is in the first episode, with the clubs being run by Fabien. That whole world is controlled by criminals."

Exploring this weird world for the first time is the aforementioned human Lewis (Michael Socha), a checkpoint officer who works on the border between two worlds. Apt, given that he soon finds out that he's half-alien himself.

"Just before the wall went up his mum had an affair with an alien," explains Ryan. "So a lot of the series is him finding out that his real dad



This role is a bit of a departure from *Mr Selfridge* for Trystan Gravelle.



Michael Smiley (left) is also packing heat.



"I'm in a worse spot than I was in *Being Human*!"

is this alien gangster, and also falling in love with an alien girl. It's that notion of, 'Which way is your destiny?'

"At the beginning he's just as anti-alien as everyone else," says Socha, best known for roles in *This Is England* and *Being Human*. "Then he finds out he's half-alien and he's disgusted with himself. We all cling on to a certain group for self-worth reasons, so we're not ostracised and cast out. I think that's the only reason he does what he does on the human side anyway. But then he goes to Troy and his eyes are open."

That "alien girl" Ryan mentions is Lilyhot, played by the writer and star of E4 sitcom *Chewing Gum*, Michaela Coel. We're first introduced to her as a camgirl, who the lonely Lewis, not knowing she's an alien, becomes infatuated with. When Lewis actually meets her, however, he finds that she has bigger ambitions: to play the gangs of Troy against each other – until she's the last one standing.

"She's very cold and calculating," says Coel. "She's grown up in a very poor area and has learnt to disassociate feelings and empathy to get to where she wants. But Lewis is the one that starts to bring out her capacity to love."

"With her," adds Ryan, "a lot of the struggle was getting away with the femme fatale thing, that stock noir figure. I think we pulled it off. We don't go too deep into her backstory, but she has been wronged. Her plan is to be Queen of Troy, and in this world nothing else will do. But her big thing is to suppress her feelings for Lewis so she can get on with becoming a queen."

But Lilyhot isn't the only one with gangland aspirations. Lewis's biological father Antoine (Michael Smiley), an imprisoned gangster, is also looking to oust Fabien and return to his former role as king.

"When Antoine got banged up there was a burgeoning new society within the ghetto," says Smiley, "but since he's been away, it's been driven by Fabien's drugs. He's come back to rebalance it slightly... He's not necessarily a freedom fighter but he's not necessarily a gangster either."

THIS IS GONNA HURT...

Because of those such as Lily and Antoine, Lewis gets dragged into a gang war that sees him, "witnessing murders, robberies and all the shit he shouldn't be doing." Needless to say, it gets pretty violent.

"I wanted to be in a kind of Shane Meadows, Coen brothers kind of place," says Ryan, "where the comedy is funny but the violence is real and felt. I think the violence should just be awful when it's awful."

"We were keen that the show felt very grounded in reality," chips in Jarvis, "that it felt like it could happen in Britain today. Fintan pulled back on many of the heightened sci-fi elements and ideas that didn't feel 'real'. [*The Aliens*] is much closer in story and tone to, say, *Breaking Bad* than *Star Trek*."

Michael Smiley has an equally superlative comparison: "I think that what *The Aliens* does is it draws you in to that universe and makes you believe in it. When I watched *The Wire*, I fell in love with Baltimore. Not the city of Baltimore but the story – because *The Wire* is about the city of Baltimore and I wanted more of that. So hopefully Troy will be able to do it on that level, as in you can park up your expectations and just let the story be told. The art of storytelling is very important."

The Aliens begins on E4 soon.

ALIEN NATIONS

They walk among us...

DOCTOR WHO



→ Ever since 50th anniversary special "The Day Of The Doctor", the shapeshifting Zygons have been living among us in human form. A deal that was going so well until last series' two-parter "The Zygon Invasion/ Inversion".

MEN IN BLACK



→ It's the world's best/worst kept secret: aliens live on Earth thanks to the supervision – and constant memory-wiping – of a sharply-dressed, government organisation.

DISTRICT 9



→ Neill Blomkamp's 2009 film saw aliens – nicknamed "prawns" – being forced to live in the slums of Johannesburg: a bracing take on South Africa's history of apartheid.

ALIEN NATION



→ This '80s cult classic is an early example of the aliens-as-immigrants allegory – as LA tries to cope with a race of enslaved aliens tellingly called "The Newcomers".

DEFIANCE



→ This Syfy series sees several races of aliens – known collectively as Votons – seek asylum on an Earth they assumed was uninhabited. Set 33 years later, with the planet ravaged, they now co-exist in the ruins of St Louis.

The Galactic GOOD FOOD GUIDE

Tom Fordy peruses sci-fi eateries for some choice dishes

The gastro mob might act like they invented good food, but science fiction and fantasy have been serving up top-notch grub for decades. For anyone interested in sampling the galaxy's finest cuisine, here's a guide to the very best places to eat across time, space and the parameters of food fit for human consumption. Tasty stuff indeed, and don't blame us if you're starving by the end of the page.

Mos Eisley CANTINA

★★★★★★★★★★

SEEN IN STAR WARS – EPISODE IV

Location *Mos Eisley, Tatooine*

Clientele Scum, villainy and most of the galaxy's best freighter pilots. A mixed bag – some shoot first, some don't. It depends who's asking.

Appraisal While the food menu is relatively sparse – unless you're happy nibbling on severed alien arm, which can occasionally be found on the floor – the Cantina specialises in nondescript liquid in plastic beakers. Décor is distinctive but minimalist, typical of Tatooine, and entertainment comes from the resident band, Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes. Be warned though – their music is amusing to begin with but can become distinctly irritating after 39 years.

HARRYHAUSEN'S

AS SEEN IN MONSTERS, INC

Location *Monstropolis*

Clientele Monsters, obvs.

Appraisal Famed for its huge popularity (make sure you book well in advance – getting a reservation can be tricky), Harryhausen's boasts a unique sushi-inspired menu that's big on muck, goo and rotted ingredients – the slime-crusted malodorous mackerel has to be tasted (and likely regurgitated) to be believed. Its biggest draw, however, is the giant octopus chef, who cooks, chops, and serves up at a lightning-quick pace, adding spectacle to the dining experience – it's little wonder the restaurant is such a monstrous success. Ahem.

Double R diner

DAMN GOOD PIE!

AS SEEN IN TWIN PEAKS

Location *Twin Peaks, Washington*

Clientele The usual collection of blue-collar workers, FBI agents, malicious supernatural entities, that sort of stuff.

Appraisal If you're looking for somewhere homely, Double R is the perfect place – with its famous cherry pie and damn fine coffee, it's like a little slice of authentic Americana. There's even a genuine beauty queen serving behind the counter. You can burn off the calories with a brisk walk around the local area, which has the distinction of being both scenic and appearing to have been dreamed up in the mind of a psychedelic genius madman.

Merlotte's BAR AND GRILL

TRU BLOOD ON TAP

AS SEEN IN TRUE BLOOD

Location *Bon Temps, Louisiana*

Clientele As the only bar in Bon Temps it attracts a healthy variety of local patrons. The staff are perhaps more notable, with a shapeshifter, halfling and witch among their number. Inclusive!

Appraisal On the surface, Merlotte's is a Southern bar and grill like any other – soft country music, rustic interior and leather-upholstered booths. However, it's also the epicentre of Bon Temps' considerable supernatural activity, with an unusually high rate of vampire-driven murders in the parking lot. We recommend ordering a stake with your steak.

KOROVA MILK BAR

AS SEEN IN A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

MOLOKO VELOCET

Location *London*

Clientele Dystopian yobs mostly. Some zonked out, some sharpening up for a bit of the old "ultra violence".

Appraisal Casual diners will be taken by the Korova Milk Bar's distinctive aesthetic – furniture shaped like naked women, which dispenses milk from choice body parts. And while the wine list and drinks menu might seem slightly less innovative – serving up milk, milk, and... erm, milk – a closer look will reveal some rather choice mixers, such as mind-bending psychoactive drugs. It's a cocktail revolution just waiting to happen.

PANKOT PALACE

AS SEEN IN INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

Location *Pankot, India*

Clientele The elite of Pankot – Prime Minister, Majarajah, military captains. Dress to impress. And possibly be lowered into a fire pit.

Appraisal With its lavish interior and innovative presentation of food, this is a dining experience of the highest calibre. The menu, however, may prove divisive for visitors, with local delicacies such as eyeball soup and snake surprise – best suited for diners with a stomach for exotic cuisine. The slave ring in the basement and rippy-out-heart shenanigans won't be to everyone's tastes either.

THE SLAUGHTERED LAMB

AS SEEN IN AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

Location *East Proctor, Yorkshire*

Clientele "Local" types. You know the sort – bearded yokels with a natural suspicion of strangers and a knack for warding off lycanthropes.

Appraisal One of the few public houses where it's easier to end up on the menu than order from it, thanks to the lack of food (though there is tea) and a tourist-hungry monster prowling the surrounding area. Once the initial shock of a stranger daring to enter wears off, it's usually a lively place with games provided. Careful with the darts, though – missing the board is seriously frowned upon.

Milliways THE RESTAURANT AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE

AS SEEN IN THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Location *The end of the universe*

Clientele Life forms from all across time and space.

Appraisal Unlike other popular restaurants, reservations can be made once you've returned to your own timeline. It's also refreshingly affordable, especially for an extravagant venue where you can witness the destruction of time and matter before the desserts are served. Patrons generally pay with interest accrued on just one penny over 170 trillion years – meaning you can fill up on talking food and knock back as many Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters as you like.

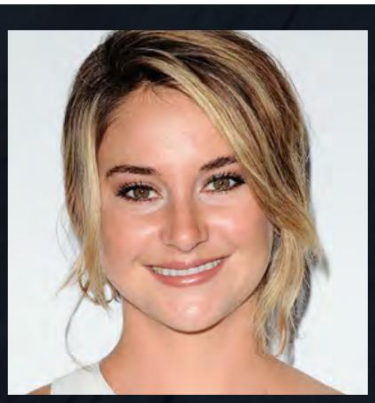
ON SET!



KEEPING IT PURE



The third book in the DIVERGENT series is being split in two for the cinema. Stephen Kelly travels to the set of ALLEGIANT to meet the filmmakers and stars – and find out why...



"IT'S WORTH PUTTING IN THE MINDS OF YOUNG MILLENNIALS"

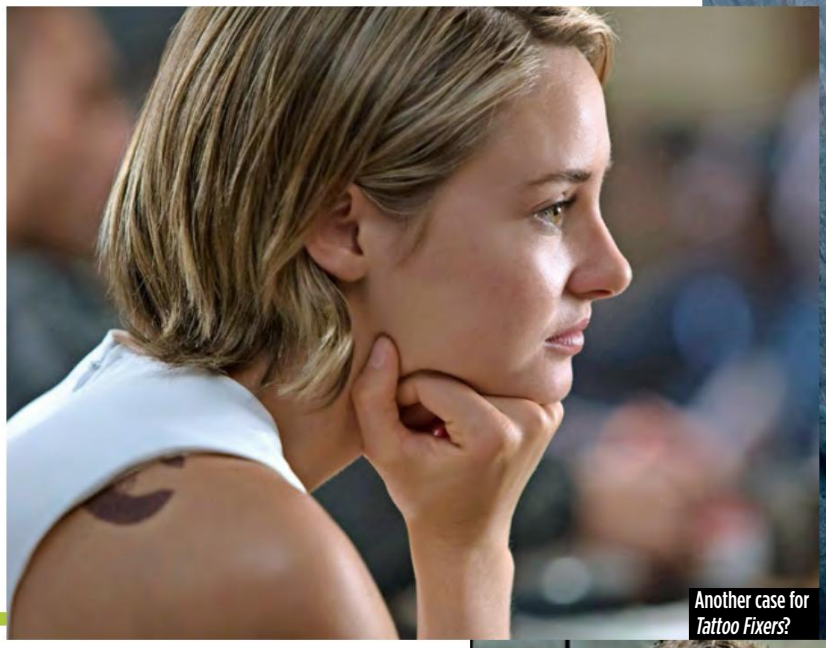
SHAILENE WOODLEY is Tris

How do we see Tris develop in *Allegiant*?
→ When we first met Tris she was vulnerable but now she's her own survivor. In this movie, there's a facet of fear and guilt with Tris, because of a decision that she chooses to make which wasn't necessarily the best decision and compromised the safety of individuals that she loves.

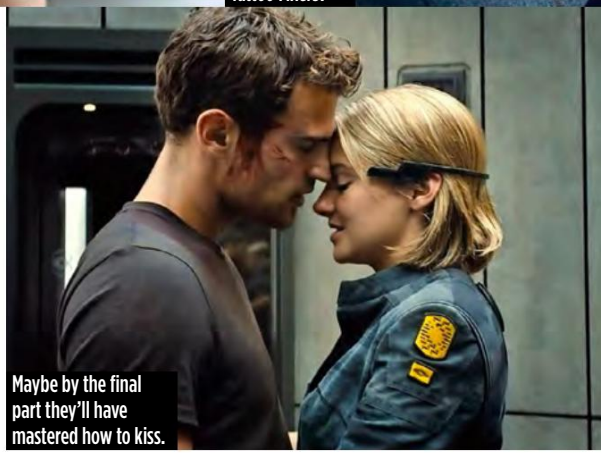
And what about her relationship with Four?
→ I think they have one of the most interesting cinematic relationships in big franchises, because they do fight, and they're not just making out every single chance they get.

You're known for being outspoken on issues like the environment. Do you think there's any serious value in young adult films like *Divergent*?
→ I think they are obviously laced with big entertainment value, to sell. But I do believe in the moral themes that are behind them, which is why I initially said yes. In this movie it talks a lot about genetic manipulation and what that can cause in the future. Right now, our society is at the forefront of our inventive, genetic era. It's obviously fictional, but it's worth putting in the minds of young millennials – to think, the choices that we make today will one day manifest themselves.

Before *Divergent*, you were pretty apprehensive about committing to a franchise. How do you feel now?
→ It was a great decision. The beautiful thing about doing a series is that you establish a family, especially among all these actors. It's so exciting to see everyone's careers take off, to support one another and have that sense of comfort.



Another case for *Tattoo Fixers?*



Maybe by the final part they'll have mastered how to kiss.

Douglas Wick, producer of *Divergent*, is watching the end of the world from the safety of a prison cell. "You know," he says, pointing to a spot in the stark, grey room, "that's where we shot Kate Winslet in the back!" In the next room, a grand, futuristic chamber, Shailene Woodley, Ansel Elgort, Theo James and Naomi Watts are crowded around a control panel, frantically trying to stop an onslaught of "memory gas". And it's here, with his eyes still fixed on the monitor, that Wick starts to tell us the most important thing he's learnt from producing one of cinema's biggest young adult franchises.

"You have to leave your cynicism at the door," he says. "Because *Divergent* is accessible and [its protagonist] Tris connects with the audience in a different way. [The original books were] really trying to express something about identity and growing up, and that has great power in it. I've been doing this for a very long time and I can tell you that whenever you set out to make a successful young adult movie, you're probably doomed."

We're speaking to Wick, and his co-producer wife Lucy Fisher, on the set of *Allegiant*, part one of what will be the series' swansong. Adapted from Veronica Roth's book trilogy, it splits her third and final instalment into two films: *Allegiant* and 2017's *Ascendant*. These entries will conclude the tale of Tris Prior (Shailene Woodley), an unassuming hero in a world – specifically, a future Chicago – where society has been divided into five factions, which its citizens are sorted into at the age of 16 based upon their personality. It is, essentially, the cliques of high school as dystopia, with Tris – raised as a quiet, selfless Abnegation – yearning to be a member of Dauntless, the brave, athletic group of cool kids. Instead she's revealed to be Divergent: the rare result of someone who doesn't fit into any one faction, and who is seen as a threat by the ruling Erudite (intellectuals) government. Not fitting in – remember that?

IN THESE WALLS

Following on from last year's *Insurgent*, *Allegiant* picks up after the revelation that, for the past 200 years, the walled city of Chicago (and its faction system) has all been an experiment by the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, a shadowy organisation living beyond the wall. Thus begins a mission to find them, with Tris and co venturing into an outside world ravaged by a so-called "Purity War": a time when the government, in the belief that society's problems were caused by "bad" genes, began to modify them, with disastrous results. It's here



His black trousers must be in the wash.

"WE DID OUR BEST TO MAKE SURE THIS WOULD HAVE A SATISFYING ENDING"

– in the bright, red "fringe" – that they meet David, the Bureau's leader, played by Jeff Daniels; a man whose motives may spell disaster for Chicago, or salvation.

"After two movies, we'd seen a lot of Chicago," says Wick, "and we'd spent time in all of the different factions. We and the characters were ready to go beyond the wall to a different world. That's been really fun to be open up."

Directed by *Insurgent*'s Robert Schwentke (*The Time Traveler's Wife*, *RIPD*), it's a story that will take *Allegiant* up to a certain point in Roth's book – the scene we're watching now, in fact – with other plot points being fleshed out. It's an approach, of course, that follows *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* – who split their final stories to varying degrees of success. Was carving up the third book really necessary?

"There was just a lot of story to tell," says Fisher. "We had a challenge with every single book, which is that Veronica packs a lot of plot and characters in and we felt that we never got to service them all. We're always apologising to the actors that their characters didn't get to do as much as they do in the book, otherwise we'd have a five-hour movie. So it's about having the time and space to do that."

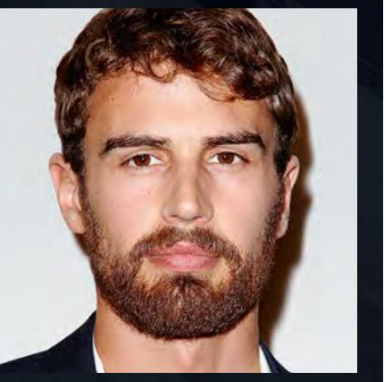
SFX mentions the criticism that dogged *The Hunger Games' Mockingjay Part 1*: that it only felt like the beginning of a story, rather than a story in its own right.

"We were very intent on making [*Allegiant*] a story in its own right," says Wick. "We did our best to make sure that, as a movie experience, this would have a satisfying ending, and be a journey in its own sake. That's why we chose this moment" – he gestures to the chamber, now filling up with gas – "from the book because it was very climactic, a real resolution."

MEETING OF MINDS

The job of scripting the split has been credited to four writers: Adam Cooper, Bill Collage, Stephen Chbosky and Noah Oppenheim, the →

REX (2)



"IT'S TWO PEOPLE FALLING IN LOVE IN A WAR SCENARIO"

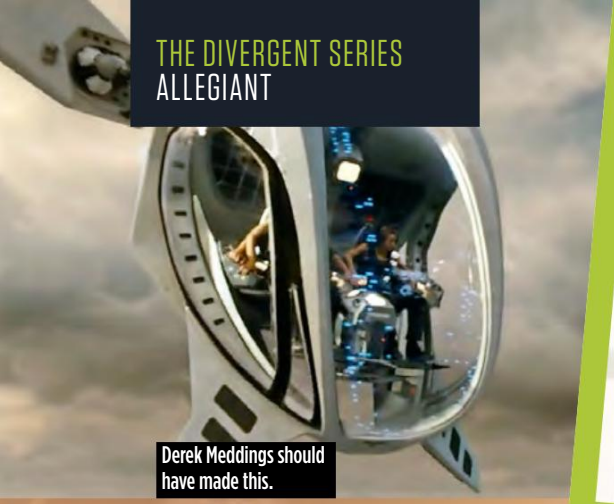
THEO JAMES is Four

So, is it fair to say that *Allegiant* is where Four starts to take the lead?
→ Yeah, it opens him up more. You used to follow the story through [Tris's] eyes, whereas in this film we're slowly diverging from that so you see certain events from both of their perspectives, which causes them to butt heads.

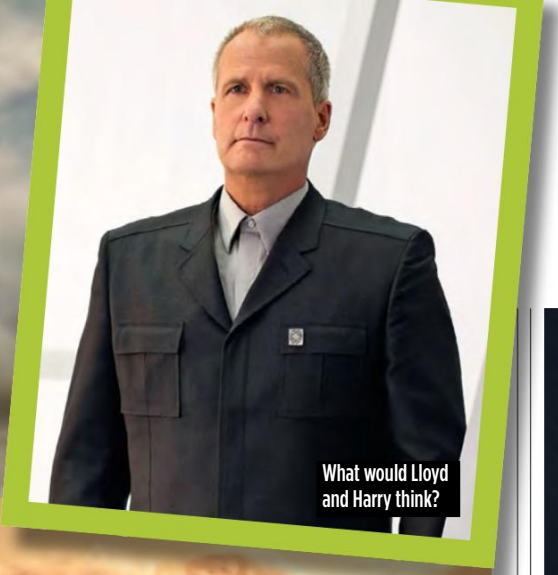
Is this where their romance starts to crumble?
→ I guess it's just a frisson between two people. She's wooed by Jeff Daniels' character who Four doesn't trust at all. [In this film] they actually go their separate ways. It's about a relationship where they've been together for a certain amount of time but then find differences in their fundamental belief systems, and trying to overcome that. They're constantly in a state of learning and adapting. We tried, as much as we can, to put in the idea of two people falling in love in a war scenario.

What about Four's relationship with his estranged mother Evelyn?
→ In the second film his character has a lot of resentment for her. He was abandoned by this woman and had not heard from her in 20 years, so he pushes her away. In *Allegiant*, though, he realises that she's coming from that place of coldness for a reason.

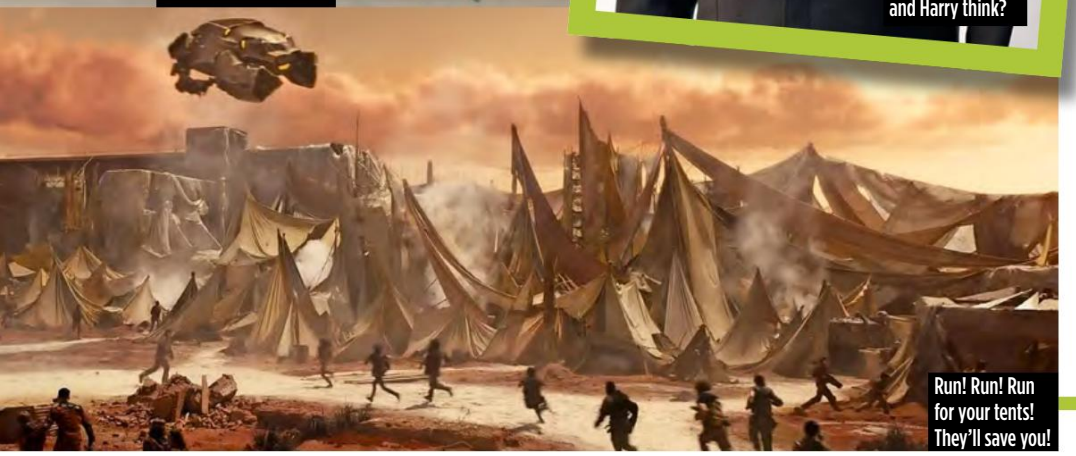
And how was it having your mum played by Naomi Watts?
→ They mentioned her early and I loved the idea. I remember watching her in *Mulholland Drive* and thinking, "This is an amazing performance!" I liked the idea of a young mother. I thought that was interesting because it means all the implications of, you know, getting pregnant young – and the dark recesses of that history was really interesting to explore.



Derek Meddings should have made this.



What would Lloyd and Harry think?



Run! Run! Run for your tents! They'll save you!

writer behind fellow YA film *The Maze Runner*. With the adaptation of *Insurgent* – just one book – there were big changes: with a newly-introduced five-sided box taking centre stage in the film, and Winslet's Jeanine being shot at the end by Evelyn, leader of the Factionless, rather than stabbed in the stomach by Tori. So how close to the source material is *Allegiant*?

"There's probably less changes than *Insurgent*," says Wick. "Because this book is so sprawling we've rejigged little things here and there but all the elements are Veronica's elements. So sometimes we'll just explore them more as that's what's good for the movie. Erasing memory is a strong theme in the book, for example, and we've chosen to explore that to build to our climax."

"We're scared of changing things because fans are so rabid," chuckles Fisher. "In *Insurgent* we made that big change at the end [with Jeanine being shot by Watts' Evelyn] as Winslet's character is dismissed from the story two thirds of the way through the book, so we wanted to have that ending. But literally not a single fan complained about it. It's more, 'I thought her hair would be more honey-coloured – how could you do that?!'"

Beyond the world itself, one of the elements that *Allegiant* opens up is its characters, who start to step beyond Tris's spotlight. These include Miles Teller's perpetually untrustworthy Peter, whose erratic loyalty and dark, callous morals are explored ("what if he can be redeemed?"); and Theo James' Four, who must navigate not only his relationship with Factionless leader and estranged mother Evelyn (who now rules over Chicago), but his romance with Tris, which begins to crack as soon as they reach the Bureau. As for Tris herself, you have her fractured relationship with brother Caleb (Ansel Elgort), who watched her get tortured in *Insurgent*, and her new-found trust in Bureau leader David, whose views create the rift between her and Four. And as book readers know, there's also the small matter of her eventual fate, "but we don't like to talk about that," teases Fisher.

For veteran producers Wick and Fisher – who, between them, have broken stars like Russell Crowe and Angelina Jolie – *Allegiant* is not only the beginning of the end for the franchise, but also them preparing to say goodbye to a cast that has risen out of relative obscurity to become bona fide stars. Namely: Miles Teller's turns in *Whiplash* and *Fantastic Four*; and Ansel Elgort and Shailene Woodley's starring roles in the mega-hit adaptation of John Green's *The Fault In Our Stars*.

"The hardest part was knowing we were signing [the actors] up for a franchise," Fisher says. "So we were having to think, 'Okay, they look cute now, but how are they going to look in five years? But one of the real pleasures of this job is seeing these guys build their characters. I remember when [Woodley] first walked through the door. She was so young and sweet and we thought, 'Right we've got the Abnegation thing, now let's worry about the Dauntless part.' We asked what she was doing this weekend, and she said she was doing an urban kidnapping where they take away your car keys, your licence and you have to get from one place to another on your own. And there was the Dauntless."

The Divergent Series: Allegiant opens on 11 March.



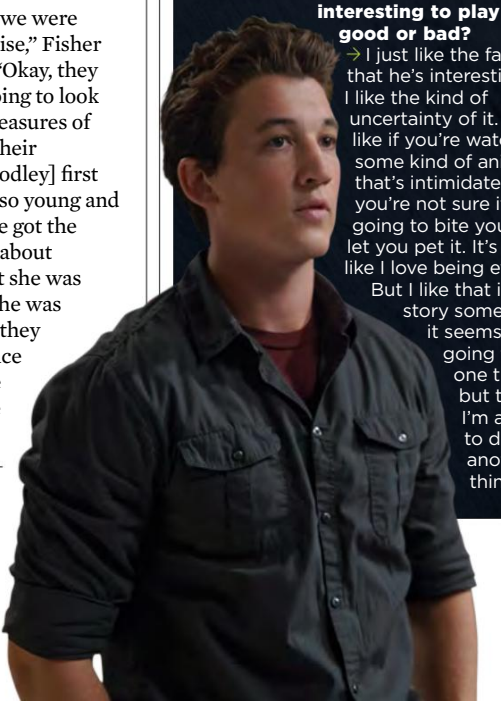
"IT'S NOT LIKE I LOVE BEING EVIL..."

MILES TELLER is Peter

Peter seems to switch between good and bad a lot. Does he finally redeem himself in *Allegiant*?
→ Yeah he does. And then he kinda unredeems himself. It's the eternal paradox of Peter.

Where do we find him in this film?
→ They all find out that everything was built for them, that they're just part of this experiment to see how society would conduct itself. And yeah, at this point they're all trying to align themselves and figure out their importance in this world. Peter is always looking out for himself. In the last one he was with Kate Winslet's character because he felt like she was in this position of power. Peter's always thought very highly of himself. In this one he's trying to align himself with [Four's mother] Evelyn, who now rules Chicago.

Which Peter do you find more interesting to play – good or bad?
→ I just like the fact that he's interesting. I like the kind of uncertainty of it. It's like if you're watching some kind of animal that's intimidated and you're not sure if it's going to bite you or let you pet it. It's not like I love being evil. But I like that in the story sometimes it seems I'm going to do one thing but then I'm able to do another thing.



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Brought THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW To Book

VICTORIA AVEYARD

Meet the YA author whose dystopian debut made the bestseller lists

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Photography by Stephanie Girard

Some stories don't work as films. Or at least they don't seem like movies to the writer who originated the idea. Despite majoring in screenwriting at the University of Southern California, as soon as Victoria Aveyard came up with the character of Mare Barrow, reluctant leader of a rebellion on a dystopian world, she instantly knew Mare's story "needed more space" than a script would allow.

Great, decision made – except for Aveyard the idea of writing the novel that became her debut *Red Queen*, the first part of a sequence that continues with the publication of *Glass Sword* in February, was a "terrifying" prospect.

"Basically there was about 11 months between college graduation and the sale of *Red Queen* to HarperCollins [in the US]," she says. "The scariest parts were actually writing the book – I had no idea if it was good, was constantly scared I'd made the wrong decision, and I lost my motivation so many times – and finishing the book.

"Once the manuscript was written, I was in an even more terrifying limbo. At least before I wrote 'The End', I could fall back on the fact that I was still writing. It was still a work in progress. Now it was ready for the next stage, and I had no idea how it would be received."

She needn't have worried. The book not only found a publisher, but hit number one on the *New York Times* YA bestseller list in the week of its release in 2015. "It's still very weird to wake up and know this is my full-time job," she says as she reflects on finding success in her early twenties. "I'm constantly counting my lucky stars."

GREATER EXPECTATIONS

But such success brings external pressure. As she wrote *Red Queen*, living with her folks in Massachusetts, there was no expectation the book would do so well. Not so with *Glass Sword*. "The first book was such a whirlwind and I was blissfully ignorant as to what publishing it meant," she says. "Now I sort of know what's coming, and how many people are now invested in the series. My number one goal is to leave readers feeling like they've been entertained by my words for a few hours, so hopefully I accomplished that."

She probably has. Picking up "exactly where *Red Queen* left off", it again focuses on Mare, a girl who can summon lightning, yet who lives in a society where, because her blood is red rather than silver, she's part of an underclass.

"The entire book is basically the next step in her journey, both physically and emotionally," says Aveyard. "The events of the first book took heavy tolls, and we see that in everyone, particularly Mare. It's been really interesting to explore how her character reacts to trauma, and what the aftermath looks like in a 17-year-old girl."

That sounds pretty heavy for a YA novel, but this doesn't worry Aveyard. "I've never felt restricted by the YA category," she says. "To me, it just means your characters are in this age bracket, so this book is YA. The series only gets darker and heavier as we press on, so maybe I'll hit a wall eventually, but I don't think so. There's no reason to soften the blow or dumb down anything simply because it's shelved in YA."

Besides, most children have a habit of finding their way to stories that interest them. That was the case for Aveyard. "Not only are both my parents teachers who are avid readers themselves, but they're huge movie buffs," she says. "I saw *Jurassic Park*, *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, etc all very young, and that sort of set my tastes for the rest of my life. After I read *Lord Of The Rings*, I kind of realised that writing stories wasn't just this compulsion I had, but something I needed to do with my life."

COLLECTION OF HEROES

Underlining the point, she adds: "I'm a worshipping child of Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, JK Rowling, JRR Tolkien, George RR Martin, Peter Jackson – pretty much anyone who can suck me into a story, but they do it best."

The mix of cinematic and writerly names here is reflected in the way Aveyard's nascent career has developed. She's continued to write for the screen too. In early 2014, it was reported Sony had optioned her Greek god-themed spec script for *Eternal*. Later that year, it was further reported it was "merging" with a script on a similar theme developed from an idea by Stan Lee.

Aveyard sidesteps a direct question about hanging with Stan, but she says she wants to work for Hollywood, if she can ever find the time. "Between touring, publicity, and you know, writing the rest of the [*Red Queen*] series, I haven't had much time to work on script ideas," she says. "Plus now I have the added question of: does this work better as a book or movie?"

We're sure she'll work it out. Meantime, let's finish with a really important question: George Lucas or George RR Martin? "This hurts, but my answer is George Lucas," she says. "I may be biased because I just saw *The Force Awakens* last night, but *Star Wars* has been with me my entire life, and is a cultural touchstone that changed an entire industry." See, she still loves the movies.

Glass Sword will be published by Orion on 11 February.

Biodata

Occupation
→ Novelist
Born
→ 27 July 1990
From
→ East Longmeadow, Massachusetts
Greatest Hits
→ The *Red Queen* sequence will continue with at least another two books. Aveyard says she's currently at work on the third volume.
Random Fact
→ Don't get Aveyard to work out who should pay what in a restaurant. "I'm terrible at math," she says. "Never ask me to do math."



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"*STAR WARS* HAS BEEN WITH ME MY ENTIRE LIFE, AND IS A CULTURAL TOUCHSTONE"

Time Machine
THE STORY BEHIND THE SCI-FI & FANTASY OF YESTERYEAR
1978

STARCRASH

Star Wars, Italian style? Calum Waddell untangles the weird and wonderful legacy of Luigi Cozzi's *Starcrash*...

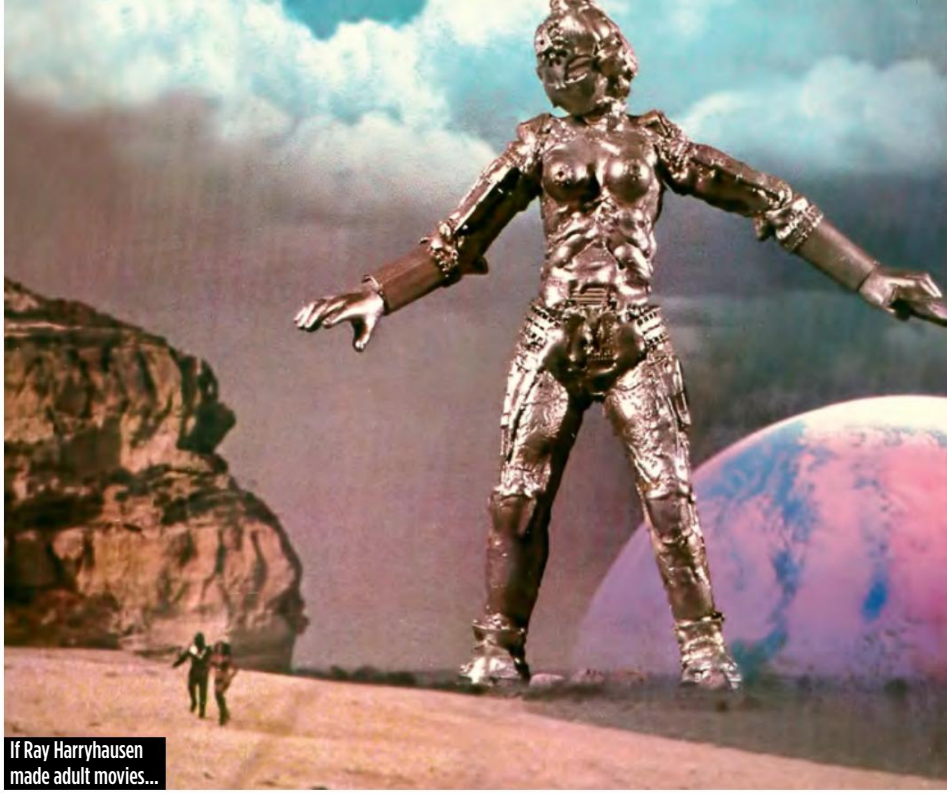
It may be hard to believe but back in the 1970s the then-booming Italian B-film industry struggled to cash-in on the success of a certain George Lucas space opera. Yes, despite boasting a business that frequently and exhaustedly brought out cheap and energetic versions of Hollywood blockbusters, 1978's *Starcrash* represents the sole attempt by Rome-based moviemakers to emulate the phenomenon of *Star Wars*. Perhaps unsure of just how to translate the lavish interplanetary spectacle of the Skywalker saga to a budget that would barely pay for Harrison Ford's catering bills, it would instead be the likes of *Alien* (1979) and *Escape From New York* (1981) that Italian producers would mimic throughout the best part of the 1980s. As such, *Starcrash* remains an odd anomaly – a family orientated galactic romp from a nation that was better known for its splatter pictures and gritty action thrillers.



At least one of them's dressed for the beach.

"Well this was part of the problem," sighs director Luigi Cozzi when *SFX* catches up with him. "Back in the good old days of Italian genre movies you could get your film made if you had naked girls, cannibals, zombies or some kind of mad killer slicing up his victims. And the reason these movies were making so much money is because Italian television was heavily censored at the time. So all of the young people were going to the cinema to see sex and violence [laughs]. Directors such as Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci had huge careers back then. Naturally, when *Star Wars* happened, there was a feeling of, 'Wow... this will change everything – but can we ever make that in Italy?' It showed that there was a family audience for genre films too – because we were generally making films for people in their late teens and early twenties. A Belgian producer called Nat Wachsberger came to Italy and we met through some mutual friends. He said to me, 'Have you seen *Star Wars*? I want to make a movie just like that.' Well, as it happened, I had not seen *Star Wars* yet. In a strange way, I was scared of seeing *Star Wars* because it was clearly going to be bigger and better than anything we could dream of making! But I said, 'Yes, I love *Star Wars*. Let me make this movie for you!' And that is how *Starcrash* happened." →





If Ray Harryhausen made adult movies...

> If you say *Starcrash* is just a complete rip-off of *Star Wars* then you must be insane

Cozzi, along with Wachsberger, began to work on the script – although the director, who had earlier worked with Dario Argento on his murder mystery *Four Flies On Grey Velvet* (1971), was eager to stay clear of any obvious comparisons to the Lucas-verse. As such, the director began to think about his own genre favourites and opted instead to craft a slightly more cut-rate homage to the work of Ray Harryhausen and Japanese monster movies. The end result, which tells the tale of Stella Star (Caroline Munro) – a young female warrior who is dedicated to overthrowing the evil planet-wrecking Count Zarth Arn (played by B-movie favourite Joe Spinell) – is a madcap mix of old fashioned "afternoon matinee" romp and loveable intergalactic cheese.

"If you look at *Starcrash* and say it is just a complete rip-off of *Star Wars* then you must be either insane or the least perceptive film critic of all time," insists Cozzi. "My movie is all about showing you the sort of model work and stop-motion animation which was going out of fashion back then – largely because of *Star Wars*! I said to Nat Wachsberger, 'I want to do Sinbad on Mars. I want this to look a little like the films I grew up with, like *Godzilla* and *Jason And The Argonauts*. And instead of Luke Skywalker we should have a female hero. If Han Solo is the man every woman wants to be with, our heroine should be the woman every man wants to marry. She should be totally irresistible!' Then, we found Caroline Munro, who was just unimaginably beautiful."

A statuesque former model and Hammer horror star, Munro had just appeared in the James Bond hit *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) as the helicopter-piloting villainess Naomi. For *Starcrash* she would be required to squeeze into an ill-fitting black bikini...

"Oh goodness, yes, that costume," laughs Munro. "I look back and sigh a little... I am quite impressed I ever managed to fit into something that slinky! But, you know, Luigi was filming *Starcrash* and sending back the footage to the producers every day. Eventually he came to me and said, 'Caroline, they love you in this movie but they are very worried we might not get our PG rating so now I have been asked to cover you up.' So that is why, about half way through the film, I am suddenly wearing another outfit. Strangely enough, though, they used the bikini for all of the marketing shots and posters anyway!"

In a nod to Lucas's use of Alec Guinness Cozzi chose to include at least one "luvvie" in the *Starcrash* cast: Christopher Plummer. Add to this Munro's handsome muse in the form of a pre-*Knight Rider* David Hasselhoff and you have a cast that is likely to attract curiosity even to this day...

"Luigi had an amazing group of actors," beams Munro. "It was such a privilege to act with Christopher Plummer, and Joe Spinell too who was a truly underrated performer. He makes for a great villain in *Starcrash*. David Hasselhoff, of course, was the big success story from *Starcrash* and he was so nervous about this film. He had been a soap star and he was not sure he was going to be convincing as this great hero – the son of Christopher Plummer and the man who was going to win my heart [laughs]. But he was lovely. I still see him at conventions to this day and he is so down to earth and friendly to everyone. He has this reputation for being a bit of a handful but I have never seen David as anything but a friend and a colleague and he was very respectful to Luigi during the making of *Starcrash*."

Despite its obvious austerity, *Starcrash* not only features a fine cast and some accomplished stop-motion trickery but also an excellent score from none other than John Barry. Cozzi was clearly aiming for something a little bit special with his rushed-out sci-fi farce...

"The film began production in the summer of 1977 and we had to finish it by Christmas that year," the director remembers. "I think we had six months in total, but – given everything that we had to do – *Starcrash* obviously did not have the sort of schedule that would make George Lucas jealous [laughs]. However, I got the freedom to cast the film and to produce the movie I wanted – and that included getting John Barry to do the soundtrack. Fans today still tell me that *Starcrash* is one of his best compositions and who am I to argue? We got very lucky to have him."

Unfortunately, even with the added "class" of Barry and Plummer, *Starcrash* was headed for trouble. When American International Pictures, who had originally agreed to release the film, saw Cozzi's final cut they felt it was more camp than cool and the indie-house, who

ALIEN NATION

How Ridley Scott's space-horror was remade in Rome

If you enjoyed *Starcrash* and fancy some more Cozzi-helmed carnage then take heed: the great man would take control of his very own Ridley Scott rip-off with *Contamination* (1980). In this one, a ship full of exploding extraterrestrial eggs lands in New York, promptly blowing up some lame-brain scientists who manage to prod them open (anyone within the vicinity of them unexplainably explodes from the chest). The trail leads to Bogota, where a monstrous Alien Queen is revealed to be hiding. Only it doesn't move. And looks a bit like a cardboard standee. In other words, *Contamination* is trash-tastic – but probably only for acquired tastes...





Stella Star (Caroline Munro) with '40s throwback robot Elle.



Joe Spinell acts like a maniac as Count Zarth Arn.

had just had a super-sized hit with *The Amityville Horror*, decided to back out. Instead, it would be Roger Corman who stepped up to the plate, successfully bidding for American distribution rights and rolling out *Starcrash* in early 1979 under his New World Pictures outfit.

"We had overspent on the budget, whether it was the effects, the cast or John Barry, I don't know," admits Munro. "We also went over the allotted schedule on *Starcrash* but that wasn't really Luigi's fault. The producers kept seeing *Star Wars* and its longevity in theatres so they wanted more fights in outer space and laser shows and stuff like that. Luigi was shooting some extravagant stuff on sound stages out in Italy. I don't even think we had a premiere or anything in the end – it really just came and went but it seems to have picked up a small following along the way.

Whenever David is asked to sign *Starcrash* material I know he looks back on the movie fondly."

Cozzi, who was renamed Lewis Coates for the American release of the film, also remains disappointed by the fact *Starcrash* never hit a nerve with audiences.

"It did okay business, especially in France," he says. "The French seemed to 'get it' and Roger Corman was generally happy with how it did in America. The only thing that saddens me is that I think the effects were really good but they went unappreciated. You see, no one really saw *Starcrash* when it came out in Italy. It bombed. And when I told local producers, 'I directed *Starcrash*,' they would laugh and say, 'Don't be silly – that's an American movie. We don't do these films in Rome...' So it did not help my career."

Nevertheless, as a sci-fi flick that, especially today, boasts a solid fan base (blame the Hasselhoff connection, or perhaps Munro in that bikini) *Starcrash* has finally begun to emerge from the shadows and hold its own as something other than just "a *Star Wars* wannabe".

"I am actually very proud of it," smiles Munro. "I have attended revivals of it in France, Italy and America over the past few years and I think it has a nice fan buzz around it today. For a small film it looks really good – it's a very stylish and colourful caper even if it doesn't match up to the big blockbusters of today. Still, if they were to offer me a chance to do a sequel I wouldn't say no. They might have to find someone else to fit into the outfit though [laughs]."



David Hasselhoff's Prince Simon has *really* clean hair.



Akton was played by evangelist whistleblower Marjoe Gortner.



Stella goes interstellar.

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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES

Slayin' Austen

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 11 FEBRUARY

15 | 108 minutes

Director **Burr Steers**

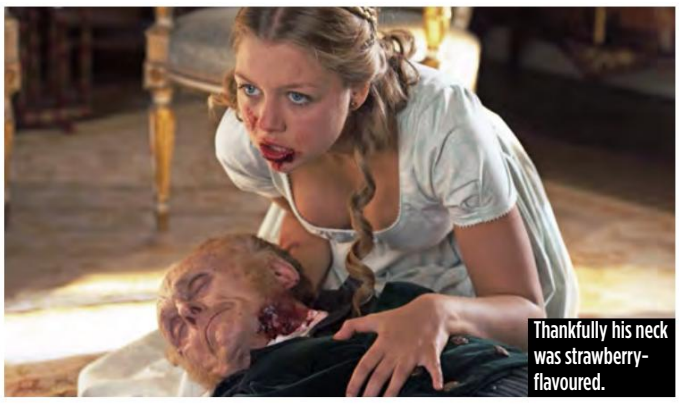
Cast **Lily James, Sam Riley, Matt Smith, Lena Headey, Charles Dance**

"A woman is either highly trained or highly refined," Lily James's kick-ass heroine Lizzy Bennet says, defending her dedication to martial arts. "One cannot afford the luxury of both in these times." On this evidence, a film can either be a costume drama or a horror film. *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies* can't deliver both, despite six years of hellish development.

Which isn't to say it's an unfaithful adaptation. Back in 2008, Quirk Books editor Jason Rekulak wrote a list of (his words), "Popular fanboy characters like ninjas, pirates, zombies, and monkeys," then shoved them into as many public domain books as possible. *Pride And Prejudice* got ninjas and zombies, the best title of the lot, and an inexplicably rabid fanbase, who'd probably enjoy a family member's wake if you stuck a zombie into it.

The big-screen version sticks fairly closely to that set text, and has all the problems you'd expect of a Jane Austen story with undead monsters scattered haphazardly throughout. The film appears to have been cast using the same mindset in which the book was created, with popular fan-fave actors – including one Doctor Who (Matt Smith) and two of *Game Of Thrones*' Lannisters (Charles Dance, Lena Headey) – making all-too-brief appearances which amount to little more than extended cameos.

The plot throws us face-first into a Regency-era England in which zombies aren't just accepted as a reality, but are fought on a daily basis by anyone within arm's reach of a sword. Despite this key change, all of Austen's plot points remain intact, with her high-concept – feisty society girl Elizabeth Bennet refuses suitors, despite the pressures from her family to settle down – barely affected by the presence of brain-chompers.



Thankfully his neck was strawberry-flavoured.



Antiques Roadshow got feisty.

Considering the book's regarded as a feminist masterpiece with one of the strongest central female characters in fiction, it's odd that the film opens on Sam Riley's love-interest/zombie-killer Mr Darcy, who's immediately undressed and inspected for wounds, before being objectified by the elderly man conducting the health check. It's an early subversion of the male gaze, and

> "It's hard to know what this film is for"

combined with our first gawp at the female leads (cleaning weapons and discussing their Shaolin kung fu training) raises expectations for something genuinely exciting: a fully female-focused action flick.

Sadly, we're swiftly into the first



weird tonal shift – and it's got nothing to do with the clash between corset drama and gore flick. The sisters tool up in a slow-mo sequence full of thigh-flesh fetishisation that looks like a deleted scene from – whisper it – *Lesbian Vampire Killers*.

The action industry has been steadily moving towards improved female representation, and there's an early shot here – featuring not one but *five* bad-ass female leads; it's so cool it'll give you goosebumps – that makes you think *Zombies* could be another trailblazing example.

Sadly, it's a false dawn: the males have more power than the women, and even a fun scrap between Darcy and Lizzy is reduced to a bodice-ripping boob gag that feels too much like *Carry On*.

Without that element of girl power, it's hard to know what this film is for. It's certainly not ghoul power – the zombies are weirdly toothless, and surprisingly occasional, with the runtime definitely more focused on *Pride And Prejudice* than it is zombies.

It's a weird choice. Fans of Austen's book will be put off by the title, while horror movie geeks will feel their brain-flesh rotting from boredom throughout, thanks to long stretches of dialogue without a single "Grrr, argh" in earshot.

P&P&Z has two saving graces. Lily James is majestic as Lizzy Bennet, while Matt Smith displays the awkward charm and comic timing that made the Eleventh Doctor so special. But with Smith a mere supporting player, and James let down by strange scripting, even they can't save *Zombies* from flatlining. **Sam Ashurst**

i When first announced, *P&P&Z* had Natalie Portman lined-up as Lizzy Bennet, and David O Russell down to direct.

REGENCY REGENERATED

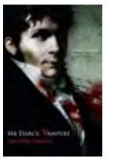
Four more spins on Jane Austen



LOST IN AUSTEN

In this four-part ITV series, a modern-day Austen fan swaps places with Elizabeth Bennet via a mysterious door, then must try to get the narrative back on track. Cue culture-clash comedy!

MR DARCY, VAMPYRE



Amanda Grange's 2009 book sees the newly married Mr and Mrs Darcy embarking on a tour of the continent. But why do rioting villagers keep trying to kill Lizzy's husband? Guess...

SEDUCING MR DARCY



In Gwyn Cready's 2008 time travel romance, a divorcee is transported into Austen's novel via, er, a massage, once again changing the story. Turn to page 52 for the dirty bits.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY AND SEA MONSTERS



Another Quirk Books mashup relocates Austen's 1811 novel to an alternate universe where an event called "The Alteration" has turned sea creatures – including giant lobsters and man-eating jellyfish – against humanity.

GOOSEBUMPS

A Franken-Stine creation

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 5 FEBRUARY
PG | 103 minutes
Director **Rob Letterman**
Cast **Jack Black, Dylan Minnette, Odeya Rush, Ryan Lee, Amy Ryan, Jillian Bell**

Faced with the daunting task – one that has taken nearly 20 years to bring to fruition – of turning prodigious author RL Stine's teen-horror *Goosebumps* books into a film, writer Darren Lemke and director Rob Letterman have plumped for... all of them.

Well, several, at least, cramming together creatures such as the Abominable Snowman, evil gnomes and Slappy the diabolical dummy into one overstuffed tale that also features Stine himself.

Embodied here by Jack Black in slightly restrained form (so, maniacally mugging compared to your average human...), Stine is a paranoid recluse, fearful that his secret will be revealed to the world. See, his books contain actual beasties, and if they were to be unlocked, chaos would spill from the pages. Bet you can't guess what happens next, after Stine underestimates the curiosity of new neighbour Zack (Dylan Minnette) and the fast-formed connection between the young man and Stine's daughter Hannah (Odeya Rush).

Slow-cooking at first, it later boils over into a frenetic, effects-heavy showdown between the horrors and the humans, neither of which offer much in the way of depth, beyond driving the plot. But Letterman, who previously worked with Black on *Gulliver's Travels*, and who goes CG-happy again with this one, still manages to drum up a little more honest heart and humour to go with the mild, child-friendly scares.


Ricky Gervais conducted the zombie choir.

The smartest move made here was rounding up an assortment of talented, funny types for supporting roles, including Ryan Lee as Zack's wannabe new best friend, Amy Ryan as Zack's mother and Jillian Bell as his wacky aunt.

Goosebumps is predictably frantic and slightly underdeveloped in places, which is ironic given the time it's spent being nurtured by more than one studio. Yet it's diverting enough if you don't mind a lot of goofy acting from both people and monsters. **James White**

i The '90s CBBC TV series of *Goosebumps* has just been reissued, in a 12-disc box set containing all 68 episodes.


Yep, this one'll do for the passport picture.

MISS HOKUSAI

Anime artistry

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
12A | 90 minutes
Director **Keiichi Hara**
Cast **Anne Watanabe, Yutaka Matsushiqe, Danshun Tatekawa**

At first sight, this unusual anime film doesn't seem like *SFX* territory. It's a period drama, set in the city of Edo (now Tokyo) in 1814, about the daily life of O-Ei, a striking young woman. She's an artist, the daughter of the great artist Hokusai, best known for his print "The Great Wave off Kanagawa". Much of the film depicts the cramped, untidy working conditions of father and daughter – which are amusingly like those of comics artists today – and O-Ei's various relationships, familial and otherwise.

It's very episodic, and some of these episodes are unexpectedly supernatural – such as a vignette about a courtesan with a detachable astral head, and a painting of hell which Hokusai must "exorcise". These sections are well-done in themselves – the courtesan one is particularly spooky – but ultimately they detract from the film. Such an episodic film depends on us getting to know the characters intimately. While O-Ei and her acquaintances are intriguing and even charming, the supernatural scenes don't help us understand how the characters tick.

Miss Hokusai is an elegant, well-made film, but perhaps would have been better off as a television series, even if that meant lower production values. **Andrew Osmond**

i Hokusai also made erotic print "The Dream Of The Fisherman's Wife", which features a woman having sex with two octopuses.


Ken blatantly ignored the paintball rules.

THE SURVIVALIST

Post-apocalyptic *The Good Life*

★★★½☆

RELEASED 12 FEBRUARY
18 | 103 minutes
Director **Stephen Fingleton**
Cast **Martin McCann, Mia Goth, Olwen Fouéré, Andrew Simpson**

A largely plotless, humourless, low-budget, unrelentingly grim post-apocalyptic flick filmed in a forest. Not sounding promising, is it? Probably another of those endless zombie movies that look like a bunch of mates playing *The Walking Dead* down the woods.

But no. *The Survivalist* may be minimalist but it also proves that you can take any tired old genre and give it new energy if you approach it with intelligence, style and commitment. Be warned, though. This Northern Irish indie is an *arthouse* post-apocalypse: think *The Road* or Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Little happens for a lot of the time; dialogue is sparse; the drama is largely channelled through nuance.

In an indeterminate future where the world population has plummeted after running out of food due to oil petering out, a never-named survivalist ekes out an existence in the backwoods, growing his own food and recycling looters as manure. Paranoid and suspicious, he's wary when a mother and daughter arrive at his hut offering sex in exchange for food, but eventually his loins overcome his sense. It's a decision he may regret....

Edgy, nervy and told primarily through images and the subtle expressions of a damned fine cast, *The Survivalist* has surprisingly lush cinematography and lighting which at first seems at odds with its bleak subject matter, but makes a refreshing change from the perceived wisdom that "gritty" post-apocalypses need to be bleached out. The brutality and animalistic, untitillating sex have more impact in such a visually poetic setting.

The Survivalist is not an easy watch, perhaps a little bit too one-note, and begins to lose coherence and integrity as it becomes more plot-led in an attempt to create a climax. But make no mistake, director Stephen Fingleton is a talent to keep your eye on. **Dave Golder**

i Stephen Fingleton has been nominated for a Bafta for *The Survivalist*, in the Outstanding Debut category.


Watch out for the guy on your right!

THE FOREST

Dead wood

★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 26 FEBRUARY
15 (TBC) | TBC minutes
Director **Jason Zada**
Cast **Natalie Dormer, Taylor Kinney, Eoin Macken**

The Aokigahara forest, near the base of Mount Fuji in Japan, is infamous for the inordinate amount of suicides that occur there, and should lend itself to spectacularly morbid cinematic homages. Sadly, this isn't one.

Natalie Dormer plays dual roles as no-nonsense Sara and her wilder sister Jesse, both tormented by their parents' unresolved deaths. When Jesse goes missing in Aokigahara, Sara takes a 6,000-mile trip to find her. Aided by a handsome stranger (Taylor Kinney) who may be a killer, she travels deep into the woods, getting spooked by her own dark past as well as all manner of off-the-rack Asian ghosts.

First-time director Jason Zada takes a stab at claustrophobic, surreal horror, and a few shots of fog-choked trees and ominous ice caves nearly chill the blood, but with only two main characters – neither of whom garner much interest – there's not a lot of room for body count or sudden deaths. There is, however, plenty of time to tromp around in the woods, and that's basically all this movie is: a tiresome hike that leads to a cheap, cop-out ending.

Your last weekend camping trip had more thrills and chills. **Ken McIntyre**

i Statistics about suicides in Aokigahara are no longer published, but in 2003 (the last year they were), there were 105.


Metallica's new direction raised eyebrows.

JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 12 FEBRUARY
PG | TBC minutes

Based on a half-baked '80s cartoon about a rock band that goes on super hero-y adventures coordinated by a prescient synthesiser, *Jem And The Holograms* attempts to ground its source material in a rags-to-riches tale told through the lens of YouTube videos.

Aubrey Peeples is the bedroom folk singer who becomes a sensation. It's hobbled by inept storytelling and drab visuals; fans should stick with their hazy childhood memories. **Ken McIntyre**

ALSO OUT



Four titles to tell you about which sadly had yet to be screened when this issue went to press. In cinemas now is **THE 5TH WAVE**, an adaptation of the alien invasion YA book. Also out: Aussie horror **BACKTRACK**, described as "*The Babadook* meets *The Sixth Sense*"; as it's only getting a limited theatrical release, we'll bring you a review of the DVD next issue. This month's red letter day is 10 February, when Marvel's "Merc with a mouth" swaggers into cinemas in **DEADPOOL**. Finally, 19 February sees *The Walking Dead*'s Lauren Cohan nannying a living doll in **THE BOY**.

THE MARTIAN

Cursing his luck

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 8 FEBRUARY

2015 | 12 | Blu-ray 3D/Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Ridley Scott**

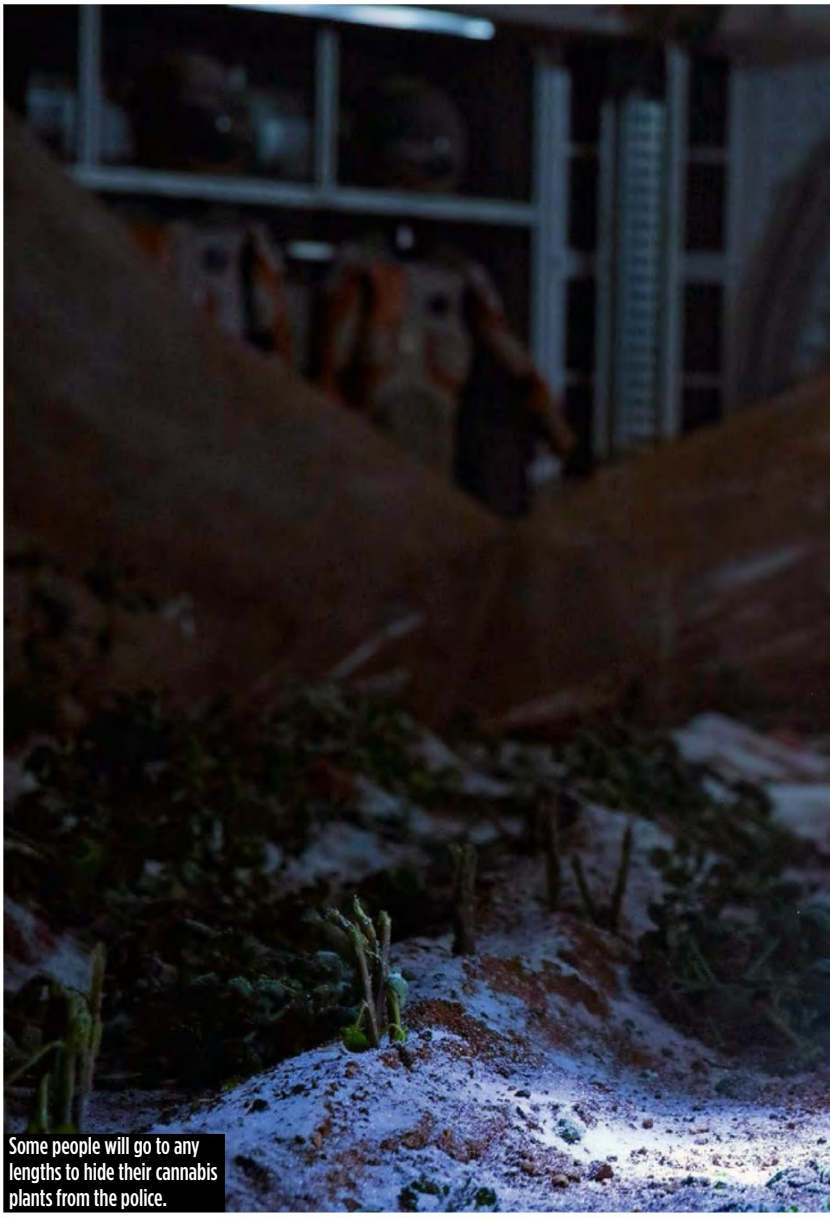
Cast **Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain, Kristen Wiig, Jeff Daniels, Michael Peña, Kate Mara, Sean Bean**

Quite aside from its entertainment value, it's probably a good idea to watch *The Martian*. The memory will be a useful thing to have in your mental armoury for the times everything seems to be going wrong: when you get a flat tyre somewhere with no mobile signal; when your sofa gets jammed halfway up a staircase; when your hard drive dies and you realised you last backed up five years ago. When those annoying days come, you'll be able to shrug, reflect that you don't have it anywhere near as bad as Mark Watney, and crack on with finding a solution.

Matt Damon is the titular "Martian", an astronaut left stranded on the Red Planet after a disastrous dust storm causes his crewmates to blast off, convinced that he is dead. To stay alive, the botanist must devise ingenious ways to grow food, communicate with Earth, and extend the lifespan of a habitat only designed to last a month.

The Martian's strengths and weaknesses are, to a great extent, those of Andy Weir's original novel, a self-publishing phenomenon on its release in 2011. That opens with the sentence, "I'm pretty much fucked", and Damon's portrayal is every bit as potty-mouthed. The laconic way Watney communicates in vlogs and – eventually – in transmissions to NASA colleagues back on Earth and crewmates making the trip home makes him a likeable character, one who's very easy to identify with. The fact that this led to a Golden Globe in the Comedy Or Musical category is downright absurd, mind. *The Martian* is no more a comedy because it contains light-hearted banter than it is a musical because from time to time Watney grooves to cheesy '70s disco.

As well as being grounded by its regular-guy hero, *The Martian* also has the ring of scientific authenticity. Weir scrupulously researched his solutions, detailing them at length. In good news for those who tend to glaze over during the science stuff, the movie pares these down to the bare minimum – although even so, there's still some truth to Richard Ayoade's witty observation that the movie is, "the most expensive YouTube tutorial video ever made". Only once does credibility completely collapse – right at the end, during the final seconds of Watney's rescue, with a touch devised for Drew Goddard's screenplay which feels like it belongs in a superhero movie. At least they have the good grace to acknowledge that by namechecking Iron Man.



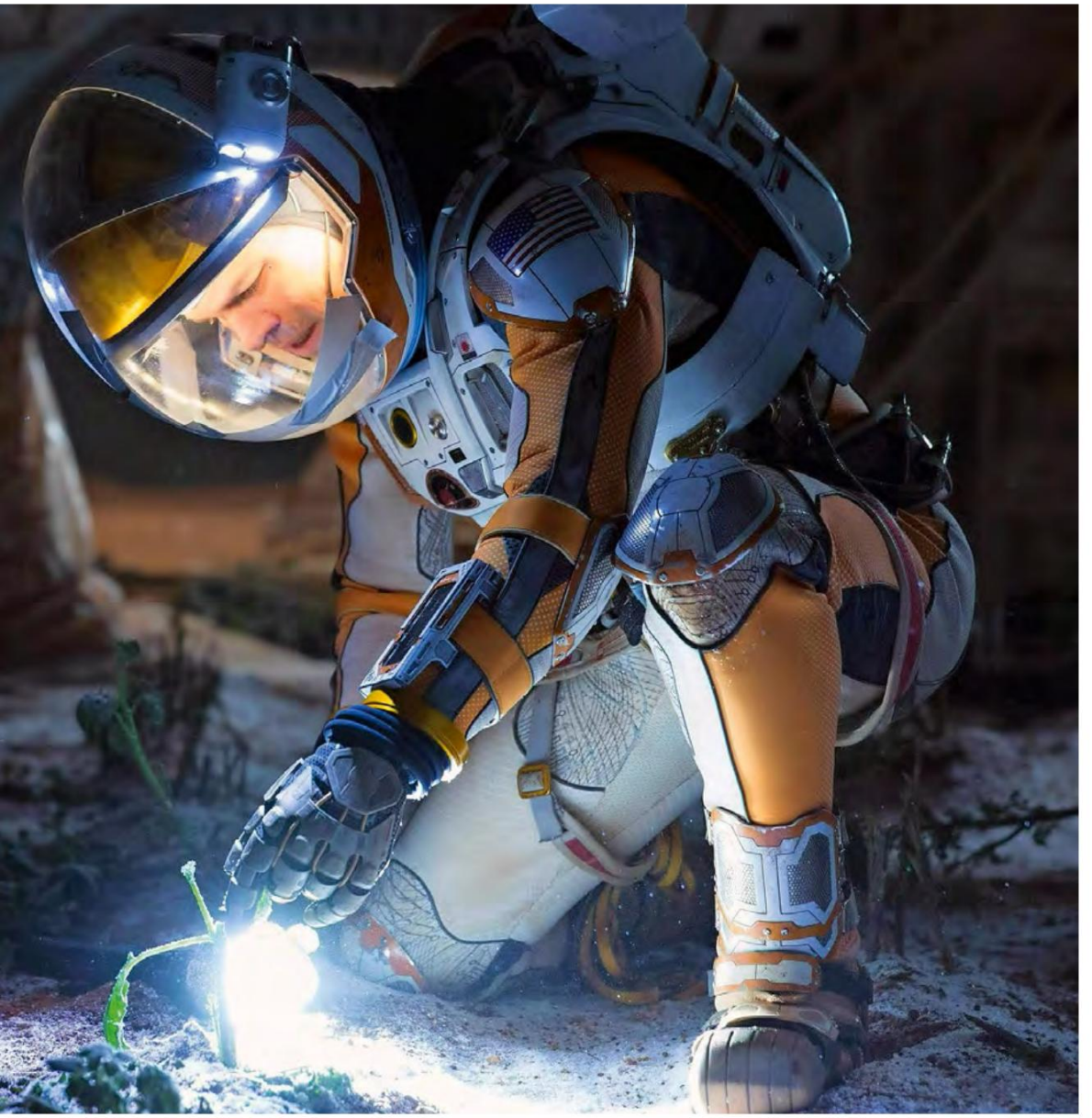
Some people will go to any lengths to hide their cannabis plants from the police.



World's Strongest Man was just getting silly.

If there's one thing you might wish for more of from the book, it's emotional vulnerability – and this is a criticism that applies to the film too. Watney goes hundreds of days never seeing another human being in the flesh, without so much as drawing a face on a volleyball. Yet, barring some straggly beard growth, there's barely a hint of the devastating effect this must have on his mental health. Whatever new calamity befalls him, he just gets on with it. The guy's a Chumbawamba lyric

> "A hymn to the human capacity for problem solving"



made flesh. In fairness, you could argue that this, too, is authentic, since astronauts on a mission of such great length would be psychologically tested for just such a level of resilience. Still, you can't help feeling that a few more signs of cracks would make Watney's eventual salvation all the sweeter.

But these are minor nitpicks, really. Creating a world so believable that the effects work doesn't even register as such, delivering the satisfaction of seeing a likeable hero overcoming one life-threatening scenario after another, and leavening it with humour, this hymn to the human capacity for problem-solving has all the punch-the-air appeal of the real-life story of Apollo 13.

⊕ **Extras** Pretty slim pickings. The DVD just has a gag reel (eight minutes), a trailer and five "theatrical in-world pieces", previously available online (13 minutes). Only one of these is really worth your time; it features a psychologist interviewing the crew after isolation tests, with Watney revealing that while in solitary for ten days he grappled with the big issues like, "How come Aquaman can control whales? Whales are mammals!" Valid point.

The Blu-ray adds a gallery of production art; "Ares III: Refocused", a faux documentary looking back at Mark's rescue seven years later (17 minutes); and two featurettes. "Signal Acquired: Writing And Direction" (10 minutes) interviews the likes of Ridley Scott and Andy Weir, while "Occupy Mars" (14 minutes) yokes together cast interviews and a look at the spacesuit designs. **Ian Berriman**

i In reality, a Martian storm is no big deal. The atmospheric pressure's so low that the fastest wind would feel like a breeze.

MIND PROBE

DREW GODDARD

Screenwriter of *The Martian*



One of the first things that strikes you about Mark Watney is that he's really funny. Was that an important side of the character for you?

→ I grew up around scientists, and they're very funny people. I've been thinking about it a lot as to why that is, and I think it's because scientists have to deal with failures so much – 90% of the time you're going to screw up – and if you're going to be failing all the time, you can't help but develop a sense of humour about it.

Was there a "Eureka" moment when you came up with the idea of using Mark's vlogs to deliver his internal monologue?

→ That was one of the things I struggled with very early, because so much of the story is just first-person diary entries – it's past tense about things that have already happened, and that's not good for cinema! But I wanted to protect that internal monologue. Thinking of it as vlogging helped, but I think the thing that really cracked it was when we realised that it's not just that he's recording things, it's that this is what's keeping him alive. He believes in the mission so much that he's still doing the project, living to pass this information on. **Richard Edwards**



DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- Marlott has a soft-focus flashback to his dead wife and kid.
- Someone deploys the word "galvanism".
- Boz (ie Dickens) shows up, and is a bit annoying.
- Mary Shelley looks upset and says something cryptic, while her kid watches on.
- There's a close-up shot of Marlott's manky syphilis hand.
- There's a callback to actual Frankenstein lore.
- The characters tramp through the mud of the Thames.

THE FRANKENSTEIN CHRONICLES

More than the sum of its parts

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 29 FEBRUARY

2015 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Benjamin Ross**

Cast **Sean Bean, Anna Maxwell Martin, Richie Campbell, Vanessa Kirby**

Typical ITV. ***The Frankenstein Chronicles*** takes the first sci-fi novel and transforms it into another bleeding cop show... In most instances, that would be cause for serious annoyance, but happily, this is actually rather good, sitting somewhere between a period *True Detective* and *Penny Dreadful*.

It helps that it is its own story, rather than a straight adaptation. John Marlott (Sean Bean) is a member of London's river police in 1827. Still grieving the loss of his wife and daughter and ailing from a bout of syphilis, he discovers the body of a child. When it's examined, however, it becomes clear that the corpse is a composite of different people. With the reluctant help of Mary Shelley, Marlott begins to uncover a sinister conspiracy that somehow links her culture-shocking novel to the case of a missing girl.

Bodysnatching, necrophilia, child murder... the show doesn't shy away from some of the grubbier horrors of the period. This, combined with an unhurried pace and an overbearing grey/green colour grade, lends the show a dour tone in its opening episodes. It's handsome, for sure, but even scenes shot on sunny days look like *The Walking Dead*.

As the mystery unfolds, the series becomes far more interesting, engaging with some of the big themes of the period, including the battle between science and religion, and women's rights. It's very much a pop history portrayal of the period, but evocative all the same.

Sean Bean's central performance carries the show. Playing a tough-but-war-weary veteran is hardly a stretch for Sheffield's finest, but he foregrounds Marlott's compassion, rather than his ability to knock heads together. Less successful, however, is the inclusion of real historical figures. Throwing in the likes of William Blake and – obliquely – Charles Dickens, makes the show's world feel smaller and less believable.

Is this really *SFX* territory? For much of its run, *The Frankenstein Chronicles* keeps you guessing. Marlott has visions, but they may just be a side-effect of the mercury that he's taking to ease his illness. The last few episodes, however, take a turn towards the fantastical, leading to a strange, slightly silly, but more or less satisfying conclusion. A second season would be welcome to explore the wide-ranging implications of the finale, but if, as seems likely, these six episodes are all there is then it's a valiant effort to put a fresh spin on a well-worn tale.

Extras Two short featurettes (seven minutes). **Will Salmon**

i Marlott is said to have served in the 95 Rifles – the same regiment Richard Sharpe (Bean's breakthrough role) was in.



Twenty-four years of arguing followed.

DOCTOR WHO – THE HUSBANDS OF RIVER SONG

River's End

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

2015 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Douglas Mackinnon**

Cast **Peter Capaldi, Alex Kingston, Greg Davies, Matt Lucas**

Feel the whiplash. After series nine climaxed in heart-bruising style, here's *Doctor Who* set to full-on festive romp mode. It's a little like stumbling, shell-shocked, out of a trauma recovery centre to find someone raspberrying a party blower in your face.

It's hard to imagine this story even existing without the itch to push Alex Kingston and Peter Capaldi together in a TV studio and see what kind of chemical reaction results. Thankfully it's a potent one: there's a cracking rapport and energy between the pair that compensates for a script that rather underserves guest stars Matt Lucas and Greg Davies.

Arriving at the Singing Towers of Darillium, the tale finds a welcome chance to breathe. Capaldi and Kingston play this tonal shift beautifully and while the story denies us a final kiss, the lovely visual of the towers at sunset, with their promise of a 24-year night, wraps up the timeline-twisting River Song saga on a genuinely heartfelt note.

Extras An episode of behind-the-scenes show *Doctor Who Extra* and a featurette on River (30 minutes). **Nick Setchfield**

River references "the real time envelope" – first mentioned by the Fifth Doctor in 1984's "Frontios".



Eurovision got worse every year.

PAN

Peters out

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED **8 FEBRUARY**

2015 | PG | Blu-ray 3D/Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Joe Wright**

Cast **Hugh Jackman, Levi Miller, Garrett Hedlund, Rooney Mara**

If you're going to go to the effort of making a prequel, you need to be pretty sure the journey is just as exciting as the destination. Unfortunately, this Peter Pan origin tale is so lacking in magic that you wonder why anyone bothered.

It starts well enough, as young orphan Peter (promising newcomer Levi Alexander) is abducted from his hellish orphanage by skyfaring pirates. But the brilliantly incongruous sight of a flying galleon doing battle with the RAF over a Blitz-torn London is about as good as *Pan* gets – and almost as soon as Peter arrives in Neverland, all hints of imagination, adventure and fun seem to float away on the breeze.

From there on in it's just flat, with some very ordinary action sequences, *extremely* mild peril, and the usual clichés about a "chosen one". *Atonement* director Joe Wright clearly knows how to make a movie look beautiful, but *Pan* has that same disconcertingly hyperreal sheen that made *Oz: The Great And Powerful* feel like someone had opened a pack of Skittles on-screen.

While Alexander does the job as Peter, his grown-up co-stars fare less well: Garrett Hedlund plays young Captain Hook as if he's channelling Nicolas Cage into Indiana Jones, while Hugh Jackman overacts for all he's worth as Blackbeard. If he's that keen on a panto gig, there must be dozens of British theatres willing to give him a try next Christmas. So if you've ever wondered where Peter Pan came from, believe us, you don't need to know.

Extras The DVD just has "The Boy Who Would Be Pan" (six minutes) – a talking heads celebration of the film's young star. On the Blu-ray it's joined by similarly shallow featurettes on "the legend of Pan", the backstory of real-life pirate Blackbeard, and the design of Neverland (20 minutes), plus a director's commentary. **Richard Edwards**

Joe Wright came up with the idea for the trampoline fight sequence cos his son has one "he jumps up and down on endlessly".



"Wanna see my Monolith Monster?"

THE MONOLITH MONSTERS

The Stone Rises

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED **15 FEBRUARY**

1957 | PG | DVD

Director **John Sherwood**

Cast **Grant Williams, Lola Albright, Les Tremayne, Trevor Bardette**

One thing about this '50s SF movie makes it essential viewing for all fans of the period: the highly original nature of the menace.

There are no animals mutated to gigantic size by radiation here – and no alien invaders either. Instead, the heroes are pitted against the remnants of a meteorite strike near a desert town. When these strange black rocks get wet, they grow by absorbing silicon from the ground. One rainstorm later, crystalline towers are advancing on San Angelo, multiplying exponentially as they sprout, topple over, and smash into fragments.

The film's desert setting recalls *Them!* and *It Came From Outer Space* (whose meteorite footage it recycles), and in many respects it feels formulaic. But the fantastic premise is treated with high seriousness, and there's something powerfully eerie about the Monoliths' mindless, implacable advance – it helps that the effects are decent. There's also something satisfying about the way science is used to save the day; compared to many of its contemporaries, *The Monolith Monsters* feels surprisingly plausible.

Extras Trailer. **Ian Berriman**

In John Carpenter's *They Live*, some homeless characters are seen watching *The Monolith Monsters* on TV.

CRIMSON PEAK

Red and dead

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 15 FEBRUARY
2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Director **Guillermo del Toro**
Cast **Mia Wasikowska, Jessica Chastain, Tom Hiddleston, Charlie Hunnam, Jim Beaver**

Guillermo del Toro's stylish ghost story isn't just Gothic with a capital "G" – the word's written in beautiful copperplate script, on a sign dripping in blood, with a raven sitting on top. The problem is that, while it's undeniably beautiful to look at, at times creepy and an unashamedly loving homage to Hammer and its horrific brethren, *Crimson Peak* fails to add up to the sum of its parts. It's certainly nowhere near the equal of the director's bona fide spooky classics *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*.

That's despite a set-up that promises much, as mysterious English aristocrat Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) rolls up in Buffalo, New York, and woos Edith Cushing (Mia Wasikowska), the daughter of a local businessman. They're soon heading back to Allerdale Hall (nicknamed Crimson Peak) – the dilapidated Cumbrian stately home he shares with his sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain) – for a honeymoon packed with the wrong kind of bumps in the night. Looks like the ghostly apparition of Edith's late mother may have been on to something when she said, "Beware of Crimson Peak..."

In terms of building mood, the film is faultless. Allerdale Hall is a visually arresting haunted house of nightmares, where a hole in the roof creates an eerily lit column of falling snow, and you feel every oddly-shaped shadow could be home to something nasty. Also, an accident of geography means the house is built upon bright red clay that leaks out of the floor and LOOKS LIKE BLOOD! Yes, it's contrived and a bit too on-the-nose (the horror!), but we'll let del Toro off because it looks amazing.

Yet, despite some typically offbeat, unconventional spectres from the Guillermo book of the macabre, *Crimson Peak* is not a great ghost story. There are a few decent jumps, a pitch-perfect score, and plenty of dread and foreboding, but the tale never builds to the scary climax you're hoping for. Indeed, the big reveal in the final act just seems to fizzle away, a disappointing mix of predictable and underwhelming.

> "Fails to add up to the sum of its parts"

The lead cast are all spot on, particularly the unfortunate-but-proactive Edith and the awkwardly charming Hiddleston, but they just don't have enough to work with. To paraphrase the wonderful Eric Morecambe, *Crimson Peak* has all the right elements, they're just not necessarily in the right order.

Extras The DVD disappoints, coming with just five deleted scenes. The Blu-ray adds a del Toro commentary, interviews with the director and members of the cast (19 minutes) and a Making Of (eight minutes), plus five more featurettes (41 minutes) on subjects such as the history of gothic romance, the costume design, the mansion set, and the prosthetic effects.

Richard Edwards



Maureen was getting fed up of power cuts.

i Regular del Toro collaborator Doug Jones (*Hellboy*'s Abe Sapien, *Pan's Labyrinth*'s Pale Man) plays two ghosts in the movie.



Sue was rubbish at painting her nails.

NINA FOREVER

Mourning gory

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 22 FEBRUARY
2015 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download
Directors **Ben and Chris Blaine**
Cast **Abigail Hardingham, Cian Barry, Fiona O'Shaughnessy**

So: the death of a loved one – let's summarise what we all know, shall we? It hurts like hell, it can take an age to "move on", and in the meantime the missing person can still feel like a presence. Brit horror *Nina Forever* restates these truisms via a living/living/dead ménage à trois.

After shelf-stacker Rob loses girlfriend Nina to a car crash, he hooks up with workmate Holly. But there's one slight problem: whenever they have sex, Nina's bloodied corpse rises up, unbidden, through the mattress. Awkward.

The fact that this doesn't deter Holly results in some scenes that are strangely sexy – which is a pretty disconcerting thing to find yourself typing about a necrophiliac threesome... As Nina, Fiona O'Shaughnessy (*Utopia*'s Jessica Hyde) has a few great one-liners – though the character's mannered kook may set your teeth on edge. But the grief allegory feels mercilessly belaboured; after half an hour you feel like throwing your hands in the air and crying, "Yes, I get it!"

Extras Deleted/alternate scenes, with directorial commentary (40 minutes); an arty montage of effects work, B-roll and storyboards (nine minutes); a brief promo piece.

Ian Berriman

i As teens, the Blaine brothers made a VHS epic about the Second Coming. Their school banned it!


The mind-meld wasn't working.

THE LOBSTER

Escape claws

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 8 FEBRUARY
2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Director **Yorgos Lanthimos**
Cast **Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, Jessica Barden, Olivia Colman**

Remember when people with little in common fell in love? The rise of online dating's compatibility algorithms means it's an increasingly uncommon phenomenon. That's just one aspect of modern romance skewered by Yorgos Lanthimos's English-language debut.

In the same absurdist vein as the Greek director's *Dogtooth* and *Alps*, it's set in a near future – or perhaps an alternate reality – where not being coupled-up is even more of a social crime than it is now. Singletons are given 45 days in a hotel to fall in love – which basically means finding someone with whom you share a defining characteristic, be it a limp or a love of maths. Fail, and you're transformed into the animal of your choice. The titular crustacean is the pick of David (a paunchy, moustachioed Colin Farrell).

A deadpan surrealist allegory with moments of jet-black comedy (one involves a dog being kicked to death) it's a witty exercise, whose bleak, Bunuelian satire of the lengths we'll go to to be with someone is cleverly worked through. But while the cast are excellent and the deliberately flat, affectless performances do fit, their alienating effect makes this is a film that impresses intellectually, but inspires no emotion.

Extras Behind-the-scenes piece; trailer. **Ian Berriman**

i Fancy staying at the hotel featured in the film? It's the Parknasilla Resort near Sneem, County Kerry, Ireland.


Karl got Movember completely wrong.

MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 15 FEBRUARY
1958 | PG | DVD

The scientist in this '50s monster movie may be called Donald Blake but he's more Incredible Hulk than Mighty Thor, periodically changing into a rampaging Neanderthal shirt-ripper after a lab mishap.

Blake (Arthur Franz) also senselessly chatters away for most of the film – it could have been titled *Man In The Lab*.

Director Jack Arnold made some corking films but also several stinkers: this stiff cheapie leans closer to the latter.

Extras Trailer. **Russell Lewin**


The office bonding day went very dark.

I SURVIVED A ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST

★☆☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 8 FEBRUARY
2014 | 15 | DVD

Despite a promising set-up – a runner on a low-budget zombie movie discovers the dead really are rising – this Kiwi horror-comedy is a tasteless, braindead mess. Its characters are offensive stereotypes, and it doesn't go anywhere interesting.

Instead, the film focuses on dick jokes, cheap gore and vaguely misogynist wish-fulfilment. An irritating fail.

Extras Trailer. **Sarah Dobbs**


"Cun oooo ivv meee a iffft peeze?"

THE BLOOD HARVEST

★☆☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2015 | 18 | DVD

There are low-budget horror movies, and there are zero-budget horror movies, and then there's *The Blood Harvest*.

An ex-cop tries to catch a killer he suspects is really an inhuman monster. He's right, but you'd never know it from the film, because the effects budget only seems to have covered a can of lychees. Then again, with a script this useless, maybe no amount of money could have saved it.

Extras Trailers; bloopers; a dire Making Of. **Sarah Dobbs**


Some blow-up dolls are brilliant.

SINBAD OF THE SEVEN SEAS

★½☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 8 FEBRUARY
1989 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Putting the bad** in Sinbad, this cheapjack Italian production with musclebound Lou Ferrigno as the legendary seafarer is pure panto.

Basra, the, ahem, "happiest city in the world" is threatened by the evil Jaffar; Sinbad must, of course, stop him. The tale is told by a mother to her daughter, and her narration dominates this dumb movie.

The odd moment makes you smile, but it's generally execrable for anyone over six.

Extras Trailer. **Russell Lewin**



Never put your hand in a blender.

EVILSPEAK

PC gone mad

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1981 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Eric Weston**

Cast **Clint Howard, RG Armstrong, Joe Cortese, Claude Earl Jones**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **You don't get** more incongruous pre-credits sequences than *Evilspeak*'s; it's like something out of Ingmar Bergman, with dour medieval, subtitled types congregating on windswept rocks.

The main action takes place in a modern-day American military academy, where cadet Stanley (Clint Howard) is being bullied. But – and now the pre-credits make sense – he comes across an ancient tome which, when fed into his computer, unleashes an evil spirit that torments his bullies.

This is where the movie, so sluggish to develop, turns into *Tron* meets *Carrie*, with lashings of gore that earned it "video nasty" status back in the '80s. Wild pigs attack! An ickle puppy gets bloody! It's just a pity almost everything else is handled so clumsily.

Extras A brief intro by the director; Noo Yoik-flavoured commentary by him, star Clint Howard and the location manager; interviews with Howard ("I ate so much pig shit I was full for days") and two co-stars (30 minutes); a Making Of which reveals that the sacrificed dog was just a stuffed toy (phew!); a 15-minute interview with effects man Allan A Apone, responsible for making it look like pigs ate a woman; trailers. **Russell Lewin**

i For the bits where Clint Howard "flies", he had the same flying harness that Christopher Reeve wore in *Superman*.



Typical of Bond to go too far on Bonfire Night.

SPECTRE

Sam plays it again

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 22 FEBRUARY

2015 | 12A | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Sam Mendes**

Cast **Daniel Craig, Christoph Waltz, Léa Seydoux, Ralph Fiennes**

Feeling the pressure of other work commitments and the stress of following up *Skyfall*'s outstanding success, Sam Mendes at one point dropped out of directing Bond's 24th official cinematic adventure. Thank goodness he came back, though, because even though *SPECTRE* might not be quite the equal of its predecessor, it sees Mendes deliver another assured and visually beautiful film that is also loaded with personality.

Picking up a short while after *Skyfall*, the story finds 007 on the hunt for more information about the people behind his recent misfortunes. At the same time, he's pondering his future with the security services, all the while finding time for the requisite fighting, driving, romancing and even some wry humour. Channelling more of the classic Bond feel that occasionally permeated *Skyfall*, here we have the world's most famous secret agent globetrotting to Mexico, Austria, Rome and Tangiers.

But though it's certainly full of a lot that Bond fans will enjoy – Daniel Craig's on form, the interplay between M and co is suitably droll and Léa Seydoux makes for a sparky sidekick – not everything clicks into place in quite the same way as Mendes's previous effort. There's some creeping disappointment with how the reveal of the Big Bad shakes out, and Monica Bellucci is wasted in a nothing role – a true misuse of a real talent. Plus the tone never quite gels from scene to scene, with the team seemingly feeling the strain of shooting such a big production being felt a little more keenly this time. Still, Bond is back for, if not a completely standout effort, certainly a worthy addition to the canon.

Extras An underwhelming bunch. On DVD you just get the short video blogs that previously appeared online. The Blu-ray adds a more in-depth look at the opening, and a gallery. **James White**

i Monica Bellucci previously auditioned for a role in 1997's *Tomorrow Never Dies*, but lost out to Teri Hatcher.



Carol's Facebook picture wasn't the best.

MARK OF THE WITCH

Lacking in magic

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED 15 FEBRUARY

2015 | 15 | DVD

Director **Jason Bognacki**

Cast **Paulie Redding, Maria Olsen, Nancy Wolfe, David Landry**

One-man-band experimentalist Jason Bognacki's debut has been compared to Dario Argento's work, but a better reference point would be another Euro filmmaker: the notoriously hit-and-miss Jess Franco.

It's unashamedly style over substance, with practically every scene featuring distorted mirror reflections, close-ups of eyeballs, or portentous slow-mo. There should be some sort of tax on using the latter to lend a sheen of significance as much as is attempted here.

What little plot is discernible concerns Jordyn (Paulie Redding). Rescued as a baby and raised by one witch, on turning 18 she finds herself in danger of being possessed by another (her mother).

The main thing this frustrating film has going for it is the striking casting: Audrey Hepburn-alike Redding has bone structure to die for, Nancy Wolfe's good witch has a captivating hundred-Benson-&-Hedges-a-day croak, and bad witch Maria Olsen gamely allows her prominent gums to be emphasised to the point where she resembles a Lon Chaney creation.

Extras A behind-the-scenes piece. **Ian Berriman**

i The baby Jordyn featured in the flashbacks is actually a boy – director Jason Bognacki's then new-born son.

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GANKUTSUOU

51st century Dumas

SFX Loves

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2004 | 15 | Blu-ray

Director **Mahiro Maeda**

Cast **Jun Fukuyama, Jouji Nakata, Daisuke Hirakawa, Kikuko Inoue**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **This is a welcome** new Blu-ray release of one of the very best anime series – a fearless, sophisticated reworking of Alexandre Dumas's *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, which brilliantly turns the story on its head.

The viewpoint character is Albert, an impressionable 15-year-old aristo boy who falls under the spell of the mysterious Count, who's presented as a Dracula figure infiltrating high society. The plot is transposed to a 51st century Paris, with spaceships, giant robots, an alien princess and a *Doctor Who*-ish ancient cosmic evil (who, in the Japanese version, speaks in cultured French).

To be honest, the novelistic script would have worked without the SF elements, which are mainly there to add glitter to the stylised images. There's lots of CG – simplistic by today's standards, but it works inside the elegant design almost perfectly. The most controversial elements are the characters' costumes and hair, created as digital patterns which often seem to move by themselves. Some viewers find this distracting, but it's a delightfully surreal approach that recalls both gothic silent films and the patchwork screen fantasies of "Czech Méliès" Karel Zeman. Magnificent.

Extras Clean titles; a 16-page booklet. **Andrew Osmond**

i Much of the music, including the opening and closing songs, is provided by Jean-Jacques Burnel of The Stranglers.

TRIPPED Series One

Sliders for stoners

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | DVD

Director **Jamie Stone**

Cast **Blake Harrison, George Webster, Georgina Campbell, Richard Gadd**

Blake Harrison is best known as Neil in *The Inbetweeners*. Here he's Danny, a less dense but similarly immature chap, who finds himself lost in a succession of parallel universes after a maniac with a sword materialises in his home.

Along for the ride is Milo (George Webster), Danny's best friend. He's unhappy that his mate is getting married to Kate (Georgina Campbell) and feels rejected. Together the two must find their way home and resolve their personal issues.

> "Mistakes shouting and swearing for jokes"

There's a host of influences here – everything from *Bill And Ted* to *2000 AD*'s stranger strips. Think *Sliders* with more swearing and a gleefully bouncing willy, and you're close to *Tripped*'s peculiar tone. And it more or less works. The central theme – that Milo is mourning his youth as well as the "loss" of his mate – is a strong one. And though it's a sci-fi comedy, it thankfully doesn't resort to endless pop culture references.

Unfortunately, it's never quite as entertaining as it could be. Too often the show mistakes shouting and swearing for jokes. *Misfits* captured that tone better, and had more heart. The stoner-schtick, meanwhile, wears thin *very* quickly. Jamie Mathieson co-created the show, but it lacks the punch of his work on *Doctor Who*.



Tripped does, however, show promise in the season's second half. A running gag about Peter Andre gets a superb payoff; the third episode, set in a world on the brink of nuclear annihilation, is funnier and more affecting than the previous two; while a satisfying finale wraps things up. If more episodes are forthcoming, perhaps they will see the show develop into something truly interesting. Until then, however, it's all a little half-baked.

Extras None. **Will Salmon**

i *Tripped* started as an unaired pilot called *ALT*, starring Gethin Anthony as Danny and Craig Roberts as Milo.



The dog's constipation finally broke.

HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2

Doesn't *completely* suck

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

RELEASED 15 FEBRUARY
2015 | U | Blu-ray/DVD
Director **Genndy Tartakovsky**
Cast **Adam Sandler, Andy Samberg, Selena Gomez, Kevin James**

In 2012's *Hotel Transylvania*, Dracula was an overprotective father forced to come to terms with the fact that his daughter had not only grown up, but fallen in love with a human. In this sequel, Mavis marries Jonathan and they have a son – but young Dennis is looking worryingly like his dad, and Mavis is thinking about moving to California to give him a "normal" life among humans. With the move date looming, Dracula must try to bring out the monster in his grandson before he leaves the hotel behind.

It's mildly amusing, with a few good visual gags, and children should enjoy watching it at least once. But if you've seen the trailer, in which Dennis is dropped from a great height in an effort to force him to fly, be warned that this is about the most entertaining scene in the entire film. An undemanding animation with one-note characters and an ending that's never really in doubt.

Extras The DVD has two commentaries, a sketch gallery and a music video. The Blu-ray adds deleted scenes, a singalong, and fun featurettes on making scary sounds/drawing the characters/throwing a monster party. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Six-year-old Asher Blinkoff's favourite part of voicing Dennis was getting driven around Sony in a golf cart. Aw.



Almost blending in with the wall but not quite.

HARRY PRICE: GHOST HUNTER

The Price Is... Alright

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 29 FEBRUARY
2015 | TBC | DVD
Director **Alex Pillai**
Cast **Rafe Spall, Cara Theobald, Richie Campbell, Sophie Stanton**

ITV's crack at a Christmas ghost story is nominally based upon Neil Spring's 2013 novel *The Ghost Hunters*, itself a fictional channeling of the life of psychic investigator Harry Price. In truth it's as much a sideways take as a straight adaptation, ditching the macabre saga of Borley Rectory to embroil Harry in an entirely new mystery.

It's an odd decision. Borley is iconic, "the most haunted house in England," as Price christened it, and this tale of an MP's wife losing her sanity in another, altogether less notorious stately pile doesn't have the same ready-built shudder.

Rafe Spall brings a troubled, stoic sincerity to the boyish ghost chaser but he's just a bit dull. There's certainly precious little crackle with co-star Cara Theobald as housemaid Sarah – Harry's partner in the novel – and he's upstaged by Richie Campbell as charismatic fellow investigator Albert, whose belated arrival injects some much-needed mischief into proceedings.

The '20s trimmings and ambiguous take on the supernatural leave the story with one foot in straight period drama, as much *Downton Abbey* as *The Innocents*. Director Alex Pillai favours a gauzy look, all dust-mote air and half-light, and the chills are low-key but occasionally effective: we see maggots writhing on rotten fruit; glimpse a bundled shape on a bed; linger on a statue of a woman, its face eroded into blankness.

An exercise in unease rather than terror, this is, ultimately, tepid stuff, never quite thrilling enough to leave you craving the further adventures the closing moments promise.

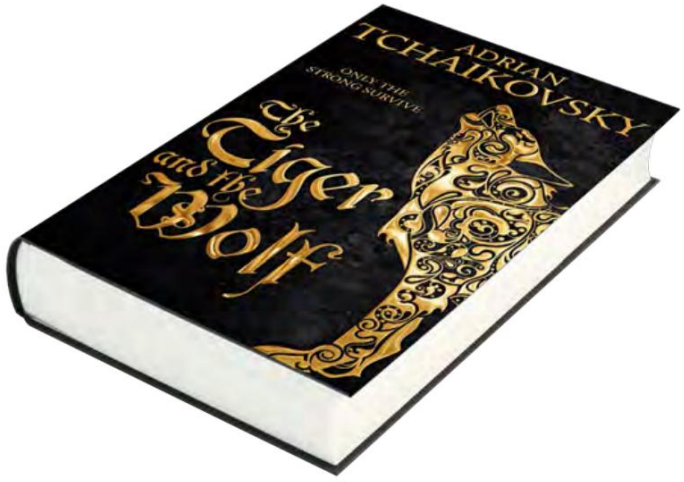
Extras TBC **Nick Setchfield**

i Fourth Doctor Tom Baker's chocolatey tones narrated a documentary about the real-life Harry Price in 2005.

(ROUND UP)



FALLING SKIES SEASON FIVE (out now, DVD) sees the humans-vs-alien-invaders show bow out. Highlight: Colin Cunningham's bad boy Pope going full-on nutzoid as his disdain for Noah Wyle's resistance leader boils over into vengeful hatred. Lowlight: the finale, which plays out like a videogame end-of-level-boss encounter. Wyle also starred in the '00s TV movies now spun off into Syfy's **THE LIBRARIANS** SEASON ONE (out now, DVD). *X-Men*'s Rebecca Romijn and *Angel*'s Christian Kane are amongst the team hunting down fantastical artefacts – hang on, wasn't that *Warehouse 13*'s pitch? It's goofy, lightweight, family-friendly fun – the sort of adventure show it's hard to make time for nowadays. Meanwhile, **Z NATION** SEASON TWO (out now, DVD) sees the heroes of the Syfy zomcom show continuing their mission to get vaccine-carrier Murphy to a CDC lab, delivering origin stories for the characters, and encounters with wacky stuff like zombie/plant hybrids and a flying saucer. It's no *Walking Dead*, but it's far better than you'd expect from a low-budget The Asylum production. Finally, there was really no need for **EXTANT** SEASON TWO (out now, Blu-ray/DVD), cos season one of this *AI*-meets-*Species* series said everything it needed to say – mainly, "this shouldn't get a second series". *ER*'s Goran Visnjic wisely dies straight away, in episode one, leaving *Supernatural*'s Jeffrey Dean Morgan to help Halle Berry and her android son stop a corrupt government killing misunderstood aliens.



THE TIGER AND THE WOLF

Familiarity breeds contentment

★★★★☆

RELEASED 11 FEBRUARY
608 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Adrian Tchaikovsky**
Publisher **Macmillan**

At first glance, the opening book in new series *Echo Of The Falls* looks too familiar to be interesting. Shapeshifters are nothing new in fantasy fiction, tribes strongly reminiscent of peoples from human history are likewise not unusual, and tales of half-blood children not quite fitting in can be found in pretty much any genre of literature you care to name.

Despite that, Adrian Tchaikovsky has nonetheless managed to create an engaging, enjoyable story. In fact, the familiarity works in its favour, giving the book the feeling of a retelling of an actual myth, so instead of hoping for novelty, your focus as a reader is on how the age-old tale is told. This is aided by references that hint at actual legends, such as the jaws of the wolf being wide enough to swallow the Moon – harking back, of course, to Norse stories of Ragnarok. Your disbelief is suspended from the start because no one expects legends to be literal.

Another thing that adds to the feeling that this is an ages-old myth is the fact that Tchaikovsky never explains his world. You're expected simply to take it as it is. The novel opens with a scene found in many myth-cycles from ancient Greek to Arthurian, a deer hunt, and the fact that the hunters are sometimes in the form of wolves, sometimes humans, is easy to accept.

This is a hefty book, though, and a myth-like quality alone wouldn't be enough to keep most people reading for hundreds of pages. Fortunately, the characters do have the depth required to ensure you engage with them. The story centres on surprisingly few characters, the main one being Maniye, whose Wolf tribal chief father, Akrit Stone River, wishes to use his daughter's link to her Tiger Queen mother's people to take control of the remaining Tigers and, in the process, also become High King of all the Wolves. Torn between her Tiger side and her Wolf one, and horrified by what Akrit has planned for her, Maniye is a character you can sympathise with and have hopes for, while Akrit is a tragic figure, one who loses his greatness reaching for things beyond his grasp, and doesn't see the value in his daughter until he's gone too far – in many ways he's akin to one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes.

> "A story that you can really lose yourself in"

Into Maniye's northern, forested world come travellers from the warm plains and wide river of the south, seeking allies to fight in a war between rival factions back in their own lands. It's not just their human appearances that differ dramatically, so do their animals: Hyena, Snake, Komodo Dragon, Crocodile, and the Champion, a strange creature unknown to men. Tchaikovsky doesn't elaborate on these travellers' backgrounds any more than he does the Wolves' society, though you get a clear picture of each one from their interactions and conversations.

Despite its length, *The Tiger And The Wolf* only really drags towards the end. Maniye spends an awful lot of time meeting and then running away from various people, and the escapes and chases do eventually grow a tad tiresome. When the anticipated showdown comes, it's very welcome.

The ending will come as no real surprise, but then that's the thing about myths: we all know how they end, and we'd feel cheated if they didn't finish as expected. Aside from, perhaps, featuring one chase too many, this is a satisfying read, a story that you can really lose yourself in. **Miriam McDonald**

i Adrian Tchaikovsky spent about three months researching/reading up on various real-world cultures.



SPEAK

Seeking the right words

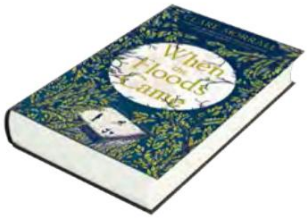
★★★★☆

RELEASED 25 FEBRUARY
316 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Louisa Hall**
Publisher **Orbit**

On its US publication, Louisa Hall's second novel garnered comparisons to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. It isn't hard to see why; *Speak* is a patchwork whose thematic and narrative threads run through a variety of past and future settings. There are six narratives: the diary of a young woman sailing to America in 1663; letters from Alan Turing to a schoolfriend's mother; an estranged couple's late 20th century correspondence; transcripts of an online chat with an AI; memoirs from disgraced "babybot" creator Stephen Chinn in 2040; and the reflections of one of Chinn's robots, powering down in an abandoned factory.

Through the people that (knowingly or not) contributed to the AI behind the babybots, and those caught in the fallout after the bots are outlawed for being too lifelike, the novel explores self-awareness, communication and feeling in often fascinating ways. It's a clever, thoughtful and exceptionally well-crafted novel, full of thought-provoking turns of phrase and illuminating parallels across time and space. At the same time, it can be hard to warm to, with most characters at one irritating extreme or another of a spectrum between selfishness and self-abnegation. **Nic Clarke**

i Louisa Hall used to play squash professionally; she won a gold medal at the Pan-American Games in 2003.



WHEN THE FLOODS CAME

Storms ahead

★★★★☆

RELEASED 11 FEBRUARY
342 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Clare Morrall**
Publisher **Sceptre**

Sci-fi often reflects the worries of its age – invasion, nuclear war, mind control – so the devastating climate change and incurable virus unleashed on the world in this novel are unlikely to surprise anyone who's read the news lately.

Roza Polanski lives in a high-rise apartment block near Birmingham, in a Britain devastated by uncontrollable, unpredictable weather and a virus that wiped out most of the population. Their ordered, introverted existence will soon change with Roza's upcoming marriage, but before that happens a stranger, Aashay, arrives with tales of other survivors and a world beyond what they've known. But can he be trusted?

Starting slowly and carefully before building to a thrilling conclusion, this is a wonderful examination of the details of life after an apocalypse. There are no zombies or marauding motorcycle gangs, just fragments of society attempting to survive in a world where the weather destroys everything and technology slowly falls apart. With a sparse, detached style and topical discussions of moral uncertainties, state power and censorship, this is an intelligent story to be savoured.

Rhian Drinkwater

i Clare Morrall fits in her writing around half days as a music teacher, at a prep school in Birmingham.



DANCER'S LAMENT

Momentous Malazan meeting

★★★½☆

RELEASED 25 FEBRUARY
416 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Ian C Esslemont**
Publisher **Bantam Press**

Before there was a Malazan empire there was a half-mad mage and a young, idealistic assassin. Together they conquered continents and forged a path to godhood (or "ascendancy"). *Dancer's Lament* finally draws back the curtain on their humble beginnings to reveal how Malazan's greatest duo came to be working together.

The book mostly follows Dorin, a skilled but largely untested assassin, who gets caught up in the siege of Li Heng while hunting down a mage named Wu. If these two sound familiar it's because they are none other than Dancer and Kellanved. They're joined by a Who's Who of Malazan names and a few newbies, in an epic military entanglement that's everything you'd expect from a story set in this world: mysterious gods, powerful mortals, vast armies and complicated magic.

> "This is very much a Marmite affair"

As always with the Malazan books, this is very much a Marmite affair. If you found the previous ones hard work this one isn't going to be any easier; it has the same complexity, so if you didn't like them it's more than likely you won't like this.

Dorin and Wu are a fun pairing, and the banter between them is effortlessly entertaining, and though none of the other POV characters are as likeable as Dorin, they provide plenty of interest – and reveal a few Malazan secrets.

The action is where *Dancer's Lament* really shines, though. There are heart-stopping knife fights, impressive displays of magic and desperate final stands; from cloak and dagger stuff to out-and-out siege warfare, the book has it all. Unfortunately it's also a bit of a slow burn, taking its time to bring all the threads together. When they are pulled together, though, you'll find that you're once again thoroughly hooked by fantasy's most epic world. **Bridie Roman**

i Malazan co-creator Steven Erikson has a new novel out soon too: *Fall Of Light* is due on 21 April.



DOWN STATION

Tube workers' long detour

★★★★☆

RELEASED 18 FEBRUARY
352 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Simon Morden**
Publisher **Gollancz**

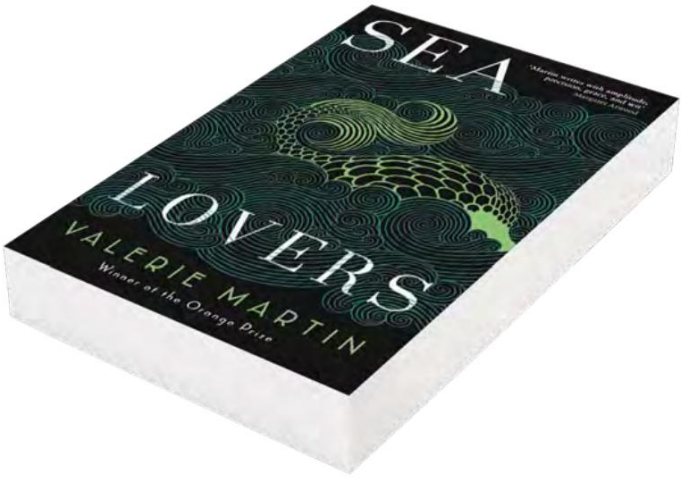
At times, *Down Station* feels a little like a modern take on the first *Doctor Who* story, "An Unearthly Child", as two modern-day Londoners find themselves abruptly whisked back to a prehistoric landscape with a mysterious, but oddly wise, older man.

But there the similarities end. One character, Dalip, is a Sikh engineering student, while the other, Mary, is struggling to leave her delinquent teens behind. They're set up with great economy as Simon Morden throws us into the story: a disaster on the London Underground drives a bunch of cleaners and engineers through a portal and into a strange new world. There Stanislav, who was responsible for Dalip's safety in the Tube tunnels, proves remarkably capable – but with little understanding of their surroundings, they quickly run into trouble.

It's the characters' experiences that make this a fresh take on the "cut off from civilisation" subgenre. Mary's desire to live in a world without rules is suddenly, and terrifyingly, granted, while Dalip's life has always been very structured. We're drawn in by their responses to this world as much as we are to what the world is actually like, which makes for a satisfying novel.

Eddie Robson

i Down Street is one of London's many defunct Underground stations. It's in Mayfair, and was on the Piccadilly Line.



SEA LOVERS

RSPCA-baiting short stories

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
311 pages | Paperback
Author **Valerie Martin**
Publisher **Serpent's Tail**

There's no denying that Orange Prize-winning author Valerie Martin can write beautifully: her prose is lyrical yet functional, compelling and evocative, and her characters feel real (which is uncomfortable, given that so many are bastards). But despite all the acclaim she's had, you're left wondering something rather vital after reading this collection of 12 short stories: was there a point to them?

Many seem to sputter out and die without a punchline; some are snapshots of lives that aren't particularly interesting; others focus on characters so reprehensible you get no pleasure from reading their thoughts.

Thankfully there's joy to be found elsewhere. The book is split into three sections: the first focusing on humans doing horrible things to animals, the second about artists and the third – the ones of relevance to this magazine – about animal/human hybrids. Naturally, the opening stories are repugnant, and because Martin writes with such poise and honesty, they're often deeply unsettling. The second round of stories are fascinating insights into the minds of creative types, with "The Unfinished Novel" the collection's highlight (would you be caretaker of a book written by someone you hated who's far better an author than you, thus eclipsing your own fame? Tricky...).

The final stories, which feature a psychotic mermaid, were-creatures and the rather lovely centaur of "Et In Arcadia Ego", are fascinating, assuming they don't end just as you're starting to really care about them. Perhaps *Sea Lovers*' flaw, then, isn't the subject matter itself, but the format: Martin's work isn't best served in small doses, but in larger, more expansive chunks. Although reading an entire novel about a cat starving to death might not be that nice, either... **Jayne Nelson**

> "Many stories seem to sputter out and die"

i Martin's 1990 novel *Mary Reilly*, which told the story of Dr Jekyll from a servant's POV, was turned into a 1996 movie.



GRAFT

Mancunian misery

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
448 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Matt Hill**
Publisher **Angry Robot Books**

***Graft* takes place in the** same world as another novel, 2013's *The Folded Man*, but according to author Matt Hill, it's not a sequel. It's largely set in a near-future Manchester where society has deteriorated towards complete and total breakdown, and follows a mechanic who finds a woman wrapped in cling film in a car boot... who's still alive, and has a third arm.

Despite its thriller elements, this isn't a thriller. It's more a morose character study, centred on a tiny cast: the mechanic and the woman (who's being trafficked, but in very strange circumstances), a hitman and a bitter brothel owner. Despite having little explicit content, it's also a physical, sticky study of places and bodies, finding rhymes between the brothel and the mechanic's workshop, between the bodies of cars and the three-armed cyborg woman.

Hill's prose is strong, but tends to overbalance into feyness. Its foundations – the setting, story and characters – just aren't compelling enough to support a book that's over 400 pages long. The first half is very disjointed, though the end, which alternates between heroics in another world and dirty daily life, is good. It's an original vision, but you may find it hard graft. **Andrew Osmond**

i Visit Manchester Art Gallery from 13 February-5 June and you can see an installation Matt Hill collaborated on.

BULLET TIME

A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS – THE VISUAL DICTIONARY

RELEASED OUT NOW!
80 pages | Hardback
Author **Pablo Hidalgo**
Publisher **Dorling Kindersley**

- Here's your comprehensively illustrated, exhaustively labelled guide to the world-building of *Episode VII*.
- It's been put together by Pablo Hidalgo, head canon-wrangler at the Lucasfilm Story Group, so the lore is bona fide.
- Crucially the book delivers essential backstory on the Resistance, the Republic and the First Order, vital details on the political state of the galaxy that never made it to the screen.
- Above all it's a more-ish trivia feast. Who knew Han Solo's jacket is made of real Nerf-leather?
- We also learn why Kylo Ren's lightsaber has a cross-shaped guard – cos of a cracked crystal inside.



Reviews



FRONT LINES

We Can Do It!

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!
461 pages | Paperback
Author **Michael Grant**
Publisher **Electric Monkey**

2015 was the year when, finally, every part of the US military could recruit women as well as men. But what if that had happened decades ago? *Front Lines* is an exploration of this intriguing "what if", set in a world in which a 1940 Supreme Court decision opened the armed forces to females. The rest of WWII proceeded as we remember – only this time, it wasn't just men being drafted...

It focuses on the early wartime experiences of three young women joining the army: white Rio Richlin, escaping small-town California; Frangie Marr, a poor black girl from Oklahoma; and Rainy Schulterman, a Jewish teenager lucky enough to be assigned to army intelligence. Rio finds herself continually underestimated, while Frangie struggles in an army where men and women can share dorms but non-white soldiers still serve in segregated units, and Rainy strives to find out what's really happening in Europe.

It feels far more like a war story than a fantasy – beyond that tweak to history, there are no genre elements – but this is to the novel's credit. If women had fought in that war, in that army, *this*, you feel, is how it would have been. A great concept combined with rounded, engaging characters make this a riveting read. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Michael Grant grew up in a military family, moving regularly – he attended 10 US schools, plus three in France.



REBEL OF THE SANDS

East meets Western

★★★★☆

RELEASED 4 FEBRUARY
348 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Alwyn Hamilton**
Publisher **Faber & Faber**

While "traditional" fantasy has (in the UK at least) often tended to be set in a magical version of medieval Britain or Europe, in recent years we've seen many more multicultural fantasies published. This YA debut is a glorious mash-up of sharp-shooting Western and *Arabian Nights*-style tales of sultans and Djinn, centred on an on-the-run heroine who's been firing pistols since before she could read.

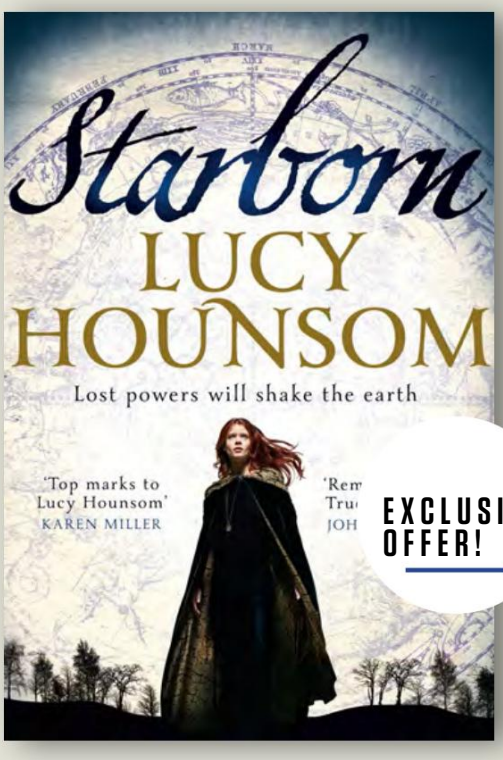
Amani Al'Hiza is desperate to escape the town of Dustwalk, her abusive aunt and uncle and a world in which women have no rights. When the chance comes to leave with a young mercenary, she takes it – but running away from home is never that easy, especially when a revolution is coming.

Amani is a courageous, well-drawn character who grows throughout the story – though it's a shame many of the other characters she encounters are just a little too wonderful to be believed. The first half of the novel can feel frustrating at times, as plan after plan of Amani's falls apart, but you really won't care too much – the energy of the plot and enthusiasm of the characters will pull you along on an exhilarating, entertaining journey. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Hamilton's first story (aged five) was "The Tangle Monster", about a monster that would tangle a little girl's hair.

WHSmith

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THE GUNS OF IVREA

Here be adventure

★★★½☆

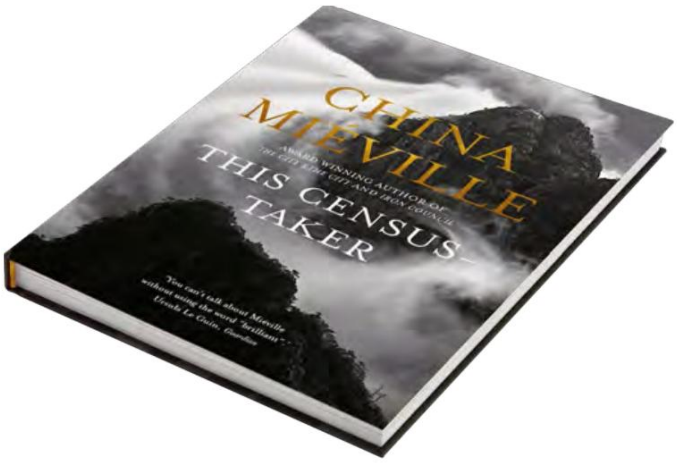
RELEASED 11 FEBRUARY
480 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Clifford Beale**
Publisher **Solaris**

Merpersons and pirates, swashbuckling sword-wielders and world-shaking secrets kept by a religious elite. Say what you will about Clifford Beale's new fantasy novel, but it has all the elements that promise a Saturday morning serial-tinged reading experience.

Better still, Beale is a storyteller who can handle plot adeptly enough to create a hugely compelling narrative. From the moment thief-turned-monk Acquel Galenus takes something he shouldn't from a sacred tomb, *Guns Of Ivrea* gallops along. Or perhaps sails along might be a better analogy, considering how much of the story revolves around corsair princeling Nicolo Danamis, a lazy young man who gets a harsh lesson in the need to pay attention to what unscrupulous underlings might be doing.

It's all terrific fun, although the publishers' comparisons with George RR Martin and *Master And Commander* author Patrick O'Brian are a little overcooked; as yet, Beale's fiction doesn't have this thematic depth. Nonetheless, with plenty of plot threads left at best only loosely resolved and hints at dark developments ahead, we're looking forward to shouting, "Ahoy there!" to the sequel. **Jonathan Wright**

i Formerly ed-in-chief of *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Clifford Beale is trained in 17th-century-style rapier combat.



THIS CENSUS-TAKER

The tallyman cometh...

★★★★½

RELEASED 25 FEBRUARY
160 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **China Miéville**
Publisher **Picador**

How reliable are our memories? We think of the life we recall as a chain of events to be trusted. Yet neuroscience teaches us that we construct the past from a combination of our own perceptions, the stories we're told and old photographs. The idea of asking what really happened is deeply problematic – who's to say?

That's nowhere more acute than when looking back at traumatic childhood events, the kind of happenings that underpin China Miéville's unsettling new novella. It tells the story of a boy who, living in upland isolation with his family, witnesses something terrible. He fears his father, a "key-maker" whom, the boy concludes, is a killer, concerned with "feeding only the darkness".

> "Imagine Kafka crossed with Jimmy Webb"

As to the purpose of the keys, that's unclear. Similarly, we're never precisely told why the boy's father might be violent. The "darkness" is represented by a hole in a cave so deep that anything disposed of there is lost forever.

Escape for the boy is represented by the appearance of a stranger, a "census-taker". All of this is related by the boy's elder self. He's a record keeper himself, but even so his narrative is fractured.

What does all this mean? To answer "nothing definitive" might sound snarky, but it's not meant as such. Much of the novella seems to find Miéville playing with mood in a book that, in addition to childhood struggles to understand the world, appears to touch tangentially on the fate of refugees, denial and favela living.

As for the primary mood all this conjures up, imagine Kafka crossed with the lush and lonely Americana of Jimmy Webb's greatest songs. It shouldn't work, but *This Census-Taker* is both gripping and tantalisingly elusive, perhaps not unconcidentally akin to trying to remember an important yet only half-understood event. **Jonathan Wright**

i We can expect a full-length Miéville novel later this year: *The Last Days Of New Paris* (due in August) is set in an alternate 1940.



MARTIANS

Big Shop Of Horrors

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
224 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Blythe Woolston**
Publisher **Walker Books**

In Ray Bradbury's *The* *Martian Chronicles*, most of the human colonists eventually choose an Earth devastated by nuclear war over the strange isolation of the Red Planet. But what happens when life here becomes as alien(ating) and inhospitable as Mars? That's the question posed by Blythe Woolston's fourth YA novel, a shrewd satire of rampant consumerism that's less about the death of the American Dream than death *by* the American Dream.

In the near future, teenager Zoë Zindleman is forced into virtual slavery at AllMART, a powerful megacorp with a resemblance to a certain US retailer. Re-named "Zero", our heroine is subsumed into the corporate machine, experiencing the same loss of identity felt by those Martian settlers.

This is not new territory: it's 25 years since Douglas Coupland popularised the term "McJob" in *Generation X*, and *MARTians* can trace its heritage through the likes of Chuck Palahniuk and JG Ballard all the way back to Orwell and Huxley. But it's an effective introduction to dystopian sci-fi, and a cautionary tale for an age when the Cold War that fuelled Bradbury has morphed into an endless, soul-crushing price war. **Paul Kirkley**

i Blythe Woolston is named after a town in southern California (Blythe!), where her father was stationed during WW2.

Reviews



BURNING MIDNIGHT

All-round entertainment

★★★★☆

RELEASED 11 FEBRUARY
320 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Will McIntosh**
Publisher **Macmillan Children's Books**

If you could just buy a better sense of humour, or the ability to run faster, or more IQ points, why wouldn't you? In the parallel world of *Burning Midnight*, the rich get to nab all sorts of new talents for themselves by "burning" pairs of the mysterious coloured balls that have suddenly appeared all over the world. But these impossible gifts have a hidden price tag attached, and soon a couple of hapless teenage sphere hunters are the only thing standing between humanity and a deeply unpleasant fate.

Burning Midnight has an inventive plot, unlike any other YA sci-fi you'll have read. On top of that, it's got diverse and interesting characters, a sweet romantic subplot, and a believable world – it's set in present-day New York, and its fictional teens love Taylor Swift just as much as real ones do. The book's best asset, though, is its pace. Once it gets going, it goes hard, and the action sequences are breathlessly cinematic.

The downside is that it feels a little slight, and the ending is a bit too neatly wrapped up. But since speed-reading spheres don't exist, maybe that's a good thing. **Sarah Dobbs**

1 Will McIntosh enlisted his teenage niece as a "coolness consultant", to check his characters were believable.

REISSUES

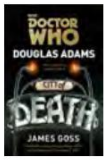
Justina Robson's first novel in four years, **THE GLORIOUS ANGELS** (★★★★½, 11 February, Gollancz), is reminiscent



of '70s and '80s feminist science fantasy. Set in a world ruled by women, it features flying cities, telepathic Empresses, and shapeshifting tiger-dog-parahumans who absorb knowledge by eating people! We said: "Tap dances along the lines between genre boundaries, kicking up its heels with a giddy, ferociously smart inventiveness." *Ready Player One* author Ernest Cline's latest, **ARMADA** (★★★★☆, 11 February, Arrow), has a fair amount



in common with '80s film *The Last Starfighter*. Its hero is a dab hand at the titular MMO, and finds himself recruited to the military after discovering that it's actually a training sim for a forthcoming war with an alien race. We said: "Sometimes the geek references get wearing, but Cline's strength is his thriller-like plotting, which is the rigid spine under the in-joke froth." Finally, **DOCTOR WHO: CITY OF DEATH** (★★★★☆, 11 February, BBC Books)



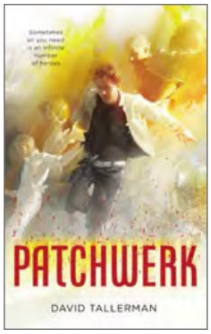
is another hugely belated adaptation of one of the stories penned by *Hitchhiker's* creator Douglas Adams. Set in Paris, this 1979 adventure concerns a squid-faced alien fractured in time, and is widely considered to be one of the classic series' best adventures. Author James Goss draws on the original scripts to insert extra little scraps of Adams. We said: "A damn sight better than the novelisation we'd have got in the '70s ... certainly does the story justice."

STORIES AT THE RIGHT LENGTH



Drowning Eyes
January 12th, 2016

"So vividly rendered, you'll be tempted to wash the salt-spray from your clothing." —Fran Wilde



Patchwerk
January 19th, 2016

"A surreal and suspenseful hall of science fiction mirrors." —Publishers Weekly



Lustlocked
January 26th, 2016

"Funny and demented... I'll read anything this guy writes." —Chuck Wendig





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HUCK

Smalltown Boy

★★★½☆

- RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **Image Comics**
- Writer **Mark Millar**
- Artist **Rafael Albuquerque**

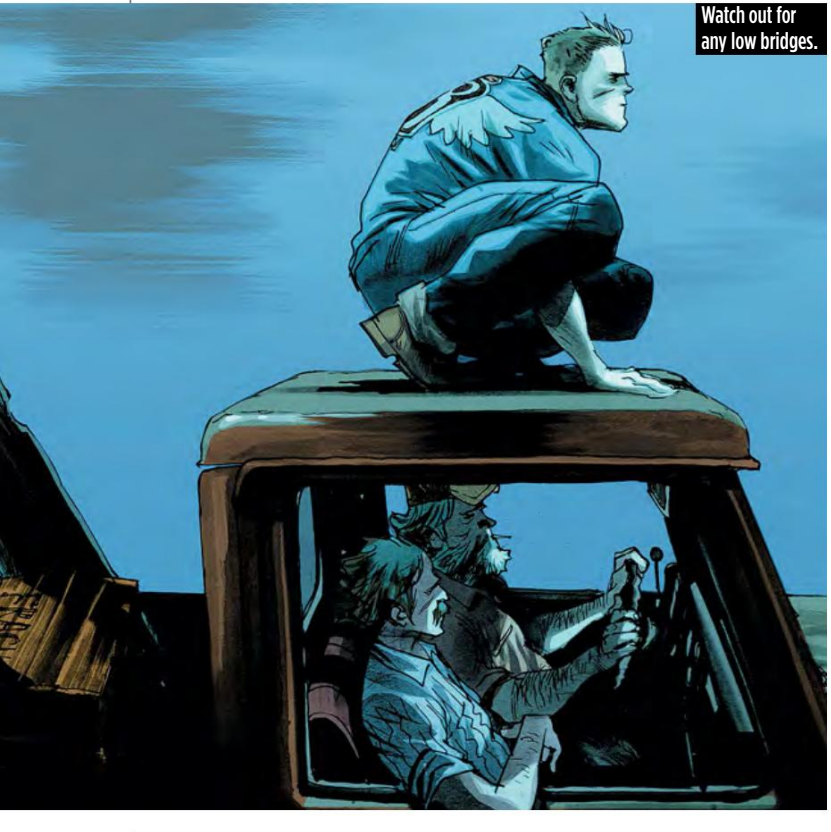
ISSUES 1-3 **"Sweet" isn't a word** that's often used to describe a Mark Millar comic. From the hyper-violent worlds of *Kick-Ass* and *Nemesis* to the political superheroics of *The Ultimates*, Millar's most prominent hallmarks have usually been button-pushing nastiness and attitude-heavy snark.

However, projects like *Superior* and *Starlight* have shown he's capable of pulling off stories with genuine heart, and his latest Image miniseries goes even further by heavily sampling the films of Frank Capra. The director of the 1946 Christmas classic *It's A Wonderful Life*, Capra specialised in heart-warming tales of small-town America, and here Millar reworks the basic plot of Capra's 1936 film *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* to create the offbeat tale of an unlikely hero.

Described as "a little slow" by his fellow townsfolk, the titular Huck is a big, sweet guy who grew up an orphan, and possesses incredible superpowers. Huck uses these powers to quietly do good deeds, and the town keeps his abilities secret to protect him. When a newcomer to the town outs Huck to the media, his good nature is suddenly at risk of being exploited by opportunistic politicians, while figures from Huck's past are also out to track him down...

Millar's storytelling is as sharply crafted as ever, and his decision to combine Capra-esque sentiment with superheroics is often surprisingly effective. These first three issues feature beautifully rendered setpieces, and *American Vampire* artist Rafael Albuquerque is an ideal collaborator, bringing gorgeous visual textures to the story while stylishly handling both action and dialogue.

He's also not afraid to push into caricature with some of the more obviously evil characters, and this is matched by Millar's unapologetically manipulative approach. Huck is an affecting and immediately sympathetic lead, and the story is at its strongest when focused on the small-scale nature of Huck's world.



Watch out for any low bridges.

> "The story heads in a direction that's over-familiar"

At its best, this feels like a fresh take on superpowers in an oversaturated market. Unfortunately, the freshness doesn't last long enough. From issue two onwards, Millar rapidly expands the scope of the story while also exploring Huck's past, and as more typical superhero storytelling elements are introduced, the story gradually heads in a direction that's disappointingly routine and over-familiar. It's still an enjoyable tale with a charming visual style, but it's hard not to feel that *Huck* had the potential to be something a little more distinctive and special, rather than just another Mark Millar superhero story.

Saxon Bullock

i Mark Millar's next upcoming comics project is space opera miniseries *Empress*. Issue one arrives in April.



This guy even trumps Trump.

CITIZEN JACK

Political demonology

★★½☆☆

- RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **Image Comics**
- Writer **Sam Humphries**
- Artist **Tommy Patterson**

ISSUES 1-3 **The US Presidential** elections are fast approaching, and the latest ongoing series from Image directly takes on the dark underbelly of American politics. *Citizen Jack* is a twisted mix of horror-comedy and political satire, and its first three issues showcase a broad, *2000 AD*-esque mix of gore, weirdness and gallows humour.

The story follows Jack Northworthy, a womanising Minnesota snowblower salesman who decides to run for President. Despite his chaotic background, Jack ends up a contender to snatch the "Freedom Party" nomination – but his most important ally is a bloodthirsty demon called Marlinspike, who's going to get Jack to the White House by any means necessary.

While it's hard not to draw parallels between Northworthy and controversial real-life figures, *Citizen Jack* is a satire that targets the entire political process. The comic's scattershot approach is helped by Tommy Patterson's inventively grotesque art, but writer Sam Humphries fails to balance humour with genuine horror, leaving the series feeling cartoony and obvious. Despite its lurid approach and some fun moments, *Citizen Jack* struggles to say anything about American politics that hasn't been heard many times before. **Saxon Bullock**

i The words "Democrat" or "Republican" are not used. "We're non-partisan in our satire," Sam Humphries explains.



The swingers' barbecue went wrong.

BLACK MAGICK

You'll be spellbound

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **Image Comics**
Writer **Greg Rucka**
Artist **Nicola Scott**

ISSUES 1-3 **It might be a bit too** late to convince Greg Rucka to write *True Detective* season three, but rifling through the evidence in *Black Magick*, we can't think of anyone better. Like *True Detective*, it's a crime procedural with a supernatural twist – except here, magic isn't a thematic trope, it's a reality, and it's special.

Opening on an ancient group ritual which our witch-skilled police detective lead has to abandon when she's called to a hostage situation, *Magick* immediately sets a tone of modern-day cynicism filtered through the wide-eyed wonder of a world in which magic exists.

This tone's reflected in the art; black and grey for the most part, only exploding into (vivid, beautiful) colour when a spell is cast. This is not just a showy technique; it occasionally puts the reader ahead of the characters, showing us that magic is involved even if our hero hasn't noticed. It creates an experience unmatched in the current comics scene.

Be warned though, *Magick* does require patience. Gradual mystery is a key element.

Of course, Rucka might not want to join *True Detective* – he's too good at writing women to slum it on that series. His latest female lead, Rowan Black, deserves a show of her own. **Sam Ashurst**

i Rowan's badge number, emblazoned on issue one's cover, is 0333 – a number of occult significance.



Quick, kick him in the nuts!

JAMES BOND

Officially licensed to kill

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **Dynamite Entertainment**
Writer **Warren Ellis**
Artist **Jason Masters**

ISSUES 1-3 **Although its release** was timed to coincide with *SPECTRE*, this first James Bond comic book series in almost two decades is based on Ian Fleming's original novels rather than the movies. But "Vargr" is set firmly in the present day instead of Bond's original '50s milieu, meaning that 007 embraces modern developments like texting, while both secretary Moneypenny and her boss M are black.

With his penchant for terse dialogue, visceral violence and fascination with cutting-edge technology, Warren Ellis is a perfect fit with Bond. Resembling a malevolent Tony Stark, bionic villain Slaven Kurjak's interest in cybernetic prostheses echoes Ellis's seminal *Iron Man* arc, "Extremis", while there's something of Black Widow about the delightfully-named female lead, Dharma Reach.

> "Warren Ellis is a perfect fit for Bond"

Masters, whose 007 is closer to a dashing Pierce Brosnan than a more rugged Daniel Craig, also brings an exhilarating cinematic quality to the numerous action sequences, starting with the first issue's traditional cold opening, in which Bond pursues a suspect through a snowy Helsinki.

The pace slows for the remainder of the first issue as M and Q set the scene, but the action ratchets up in the second and third issues as Bond is dispatched to Berlin after taking over the caseload of the fallen 008. But with the nature of Kurjak's sinister plan only beginning to be revealed at the halfway point, "Vargr"'s overarching plot has only just started to take shape. Hopefully the final three instalments will deliver on its early promise. **Stephen Jewell**

i While writing the series, Warren Ellis pictured *Rising Damp/Death In Paradise* actor Don Warrington as M.



Bats doesn't smile at the best of times.

BATMAN: EUROPA

European Vacation

★★★½☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **DC**
Writer **Brian Azzarello**
Artists **Jim Lee, Giuseppe Camuncoli**

ISSUES 1-3 **With all the** Bat-books currently crowding comic-book shelves, you'd be forgiven for not noticing *Batman: Europa*. It's worth hunting out, though. *Europa* features a great high-concept – Batman and the Joker are infected with the same villain's virus, and must work together on a cure, visiting various European cities. It shares a writer with *The Master Race* (Brian Azzarello). And it has the artist behind seismic Bat-event *Hush*, Jim Lee. Back in 2004, he intended to ink the whole run, but the artist's schedule saw the project delayed by a decade.

Lee's inks – always incredible – have an anime influence, with scratchy lines giving each panel the feel of extreme movement; it's more like watching a cartoon than reading a comic. Anyone expecting *Hush* part two will be surprised – Lee's take here is very different. The Joker looks more like a pop star than the Funhouse-mirror freak of that book.

Azzarello also deviates, with his hard-boiled Bat-tone replaced by humour and fun. Lee leaves on issue two, with Giuseppe Camuncoli's more impressionistic style matching the effects of the virus; as Bats gets more feverish, so do the visuals. Short at four parts; grab it before it's gone. **Sam Ashurst**

i *Batman: Europa* was inspired by a year Jim Lee spent working in Reggio Emilia, a town in northern Italy.



As ever, things don't go well for the guys in red shirts.

ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: INDIA

Appalling Creed

★★½☆☆

- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Reviewed on **PS4**
- Also on **PC, XBox One**
- Publisher **Ubisoft**

Back in April, Ubisoft served up a refreshing little appetiser – a downloadable *amuse-bouche* that whetted our appetite for the next instalment in the *ACC* trilogy. Given that *ACC: China* was an eminently capable game, you might expect this follow-up to serve as an exercise in story development, mechanical evolution, and general refinement. Unfortunately it fails to deliver on any of these fronts.

The sequel doesn't get off to a strong start, introducing protagonist Arbaaz Mir by having players steer their lusty assassin towards a steamy midnight tryst. It's a juvenile start to the game, and it positions him as some sort of nineteenth century jock with a quick wit and an eye for the ladies.

Indeed, anyone hoping that these smaller-scale outings would provide an opportunity for Ubisoft to experiment with storytelling is in for a disappointment. *ACC: India* presents yet another search for a mystical McGuffin acted out by a cast of completely two-dimensional characters.

But whereas the first game made up for its lack of narrative nuance with mechanical solidity and a certain sense of novelty, *India*'s tweaks are largely negative. *China* took care to train players in the art of 2D assassination before setting them loose, for instance, but *India* assumes you're up to speed from the off, and a cursory tutorial omits any number of details that will prove crucial to your progression through, and enjoyment of, the wider game.

The considered sneakery is broken up by occasional speed-running stages that see Arbaaz chasing down targets or escaping dangerous locales. Success in these sections carries a certain sense of accomplishment, but even here there's a misguided reliance on insta-fail objectives, so that rather than passing through these stages by the skin of your teeth, you'll find yourself sitting through them time and again.

Certain sections are so exacting or poorly signposted that repeated failure is simply the only way to figure them out, encouraging a trial-and-error approach that quickly grates. It's unfortunate, given that *China* made for such a satisfactory *entrée*. We can only hope that the last in the trilogy, *Russia*, will present a tastier third course. **James Nouch**

i See if you can spot the line in the otherwise rather ropey script that's lifted wholesale from *Serenity*...

THE PRISONER Volume One

Let's talk about Six

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

276 minutes

Publisher **Big Finish**

CD/DOWNLOAD **Patrick McGoohan's** brilliant '60s TV series was one unlike any other. It could never be satisfactorily remade, as was disastrously demonstrated on television in 2009. This audio box set further demonstrates why it should be left alone.

It features four stories, three of which are rough interpretations of TV originals, one that's brand new. "Departure And Arrival", a remake of the first episode, immediately sets alarm bells ringing: this Number Six never keeps his trap shut. McGoohan's taciturn demeanour was an essential part of the original – here, the demands of an audio production mean that Number Six is forever rabbiting, and since Mark Elstob plays Number Six like a man who has perpetually stubbed his toe, this means an awful lot of SHOUTING. It's wearisome and irritating.

That's far from the only annoying thing. Worst is Number Six's near-companion for the first three episodes, Number Nine (Sara Powell). The character defies sense and logic: there's no way the Village's masters would allow her to stay around, and giving Number Six a pal destroys one of his central facets: that he's a lone wolf. But this is a Number Six who, when he's not yelling, weeps.



"I hope this bus to the Village arrives soon!"

Reimagining "The Schizoid Man" is a strange idea, considering that it's a story that features the lead in a twin part, and therefore means he's continually talking to himself. Who's who? New story "Your Beautiful Village" is weak, making extensive use of muffling effects that make it sound like your speakers have been dropped in the bath. "The Chimes Of Big Ben" is probably the best of the bunch.

We're also deprived of the superb original music, and instead get little fragments of soundalike tunes. It's enervating. Another misstep is the length of the stories – two are 60 minutes, two a punishing 78 minutes. That's a long time to listen to an angry man shouting; us *Prisoner* fans should be the angry ones. **Russell Lewin**

ℹ The stories are supplemented by Making Of "By Hook Or By Crook", which is also a whopping 75+ minutes long.

THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG Series One

Hello again Sweetie

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

230 minutes

Publisher **Big Finish**

CD/DOWNLOAD **She's one of *Doctor Who*'s** most distinctive (and divisive) recent characters; now Big Finish is continuing Professor River Song's adventures with their latest spin-off. While the last Christmas special seemingly wrapped up River's saga, her non-linear life means there's plenty of potential for additional tales, and this new quartet of one-hour episodes is entertaining, if something of a mixed bag.

It's not always entirely clear where *The Diary Of River Song* fits into the character's fiendishly complex chronology (we could be post-"The Husbands Of River Song", or post-"The Wedding Of River Song"). The overall plot sees River encountering the Rulers of the Universe, a gang of rich elites fond of interfering with planetary civilisations. The stories stretch from '20s Egypt to the far future, and ultimately lead to an encounter between River and the Eighth Doctor (Paul McGann)...

As with other Big Finish box sets, each episode functions as a self-contained adventure as well as part of an overall arc, and the end result is a colourful time-twisting drama that feels like a satisfying continuation for the character. It's very much a game of two halves, however – the first two episodes veer so closely to traditional *Who*-style romps that they sometimes feel a touch generic, especially the second episode's spacebound whodunit.

It's in the last two episodes that things really click into place, as the focus shifts onto River's relationship with the Doctor. The stronger, more characterful material is matched by a reliably impressive performance from Alex Kingston, and putting her alongside Paul McGann's Doctor is a great idea. Ultimately a worthy and enjoyable spin-off – even if its flaws also suggest that there aren't an unlimited number of River Song stories left to tell. **Saxon Bullock**



ℹ River also features in Big Finish's next Eighth Doctor box set, *Doom Coalition 2*, due for release in March.



COLLECTABLES

Feel free to buy us these for Valentine's Day

1 Hopefully you'll have better luck, *Game Of Thrones* fans, but we had a rotten time of it with this **Iron Throne Room Construction Set** (FPI price £29.99; product code D3891). We got about halfway through assembling its 314 pieces, then realised that a vital piece was missing, while another was duplicated. Gah! The plastic it's made from is annoying too – either finger-bleedingly brittle, or too rubbery to make a clean connection. We'll probably stick to Lego in future.

2 Another month, another chance for boogeymen to be turned into cutesyfied vinyl collectables. These **Dorbz horror figures** (FPI price £8.99 each; product codes D4215, D4216, D4218) see Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger and Leatherface turned into spherical-headed poppets sporting benign grins. Well, we say benign... actually, it does look creepily like each one is chuckling at the memory of a particularly amusing decapitation or chainsaw dismemberment. A Pinhead figure is also available.

3 Two more additions to Funko's plush range of **Star Wars Fabrikations** here (FPI price £16.99 each; product codes D3880, D3881), in the shape of Leia and Wicket the Ewok. Both are extremely cute. Not sure about Leia's rosy cheeks either, which make it look like she's been using blusher. Both come with weapons stitched to their mitts, but if you're planning to give these to little 'uns and don't approve then you should, with a little care, be able to snip them off.

4 These **Sonic Screwdriver barbecue tongs** (FPI price £28.99; product code D1666) look hilarious at first sight – like a prop for a *Who* episode

All products are available at
forbiddenplanet
international
home shopping
www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk
01621 877 222



where our hero gets shrunk to doll size. The actual tongs are hidden under a plastic screwdriver-body sheath. The handles are still made of plastic, though: we'd be wary of meltage at any hot meat knees-up! To further add to the health and safety hazards, you might hit the sound effect button while flipping your burger and get distracted.

5 These hardback **Game Of Thrones journals** (FPI price £10.99 each; product codes D4442, D4445, D4448, D4449) are surprisingly tasteful. Each features 192 pages of lined, acid-free paper, with integrated bookmark, elastic closure and back pocket. You can choose from four designs: black and silver Iron Throne; Ned's Hand of the King brooch; one that looks a bit like a door inscribed with "Valar Morghulis", and – our personal favourite – a smart black and silver Night's Watch design that depicts the Wall on the front and the Black Brother's oath on the back.

6 You'll believe a cat can fly – well, sit there motionless while being squished, perhaps – with this **plush Streaky** (FPI price £13.99; product code C6996). It may look like an ancient Aboriginal totem object but in fact it's a faithful replica of Supergirl's pet kitty as he looks in DC's all-ages *Super-Pets* comic, based on Art Baltazar's illustrations (a Krypto the Superdog is due in April). Requires Kryptonite-lined litter tray (not included).

7 How does Kylo Ren eat? We're assuming his First Order of business is removing his mask, but after that, the *Force Awakens* baddie probably makes a beeline for these **lightsaber chopsticks** (FPI price £10.99; product code D3738). The broadsword hilt arguably makes these the most unwieldy of the numerous lightsaber chopsticks out there – there's a lot of weight at the top end that can unbalance the novice chopstick user – but if shovelling noodles into your mouth proves a struggle, you do at least have an excuse for throwing a Ren-style strop.

THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



WALKING DEAD APRONS

They're probably meant for cooking, but these would also come in handy if you want to protect your best clobber while slaying the undead. Choose between a police shirt-ed Rick Grimes and a vest-rocking Daryl Dixon.



SPOCK DELUXE FIGURE

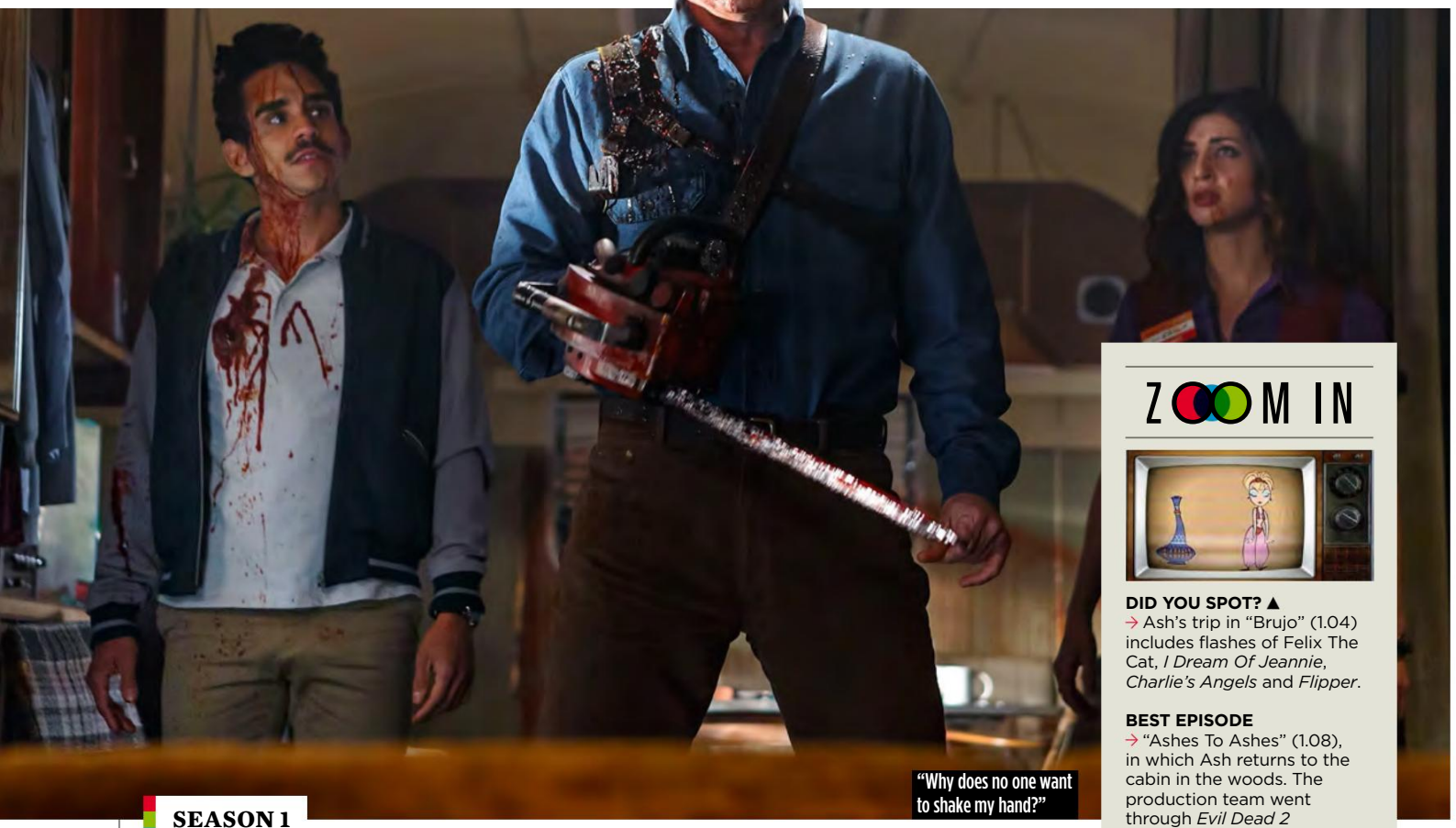
At 16cm high it's illogically pricey, but this "One: 12 Collective" figure from Mezco boasts impressive attention to detail. Swappable hands mean he can do Vulcan salute, attempt a mind-meld, or apply a nerve pinch.



DARTH VADER BUST

This life-size bust from Sideshow Collectibles recreates the Sith Lord's head and shoulders in fibreglass and polystone. Each one will be individually painted and finished – and for that price we should ruddy well hope so too!

Photography by Olly Curtis



"Why does no one want to shake my hand?"

SEASON 1

ASH VS EVIL DEAD

Bruce Almighty

- UK Broadcast **Virgin Media, via on-demand**
- US Broadcast **Starz, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **1.01-1.10**

It's unlikely to sweep the Emmys, but *Ash Vs Evil Dead* will consolidate Bruce Campbell's position as a cult icon. The appeal of Ash Williams, dimwit star of Sam Raimi's demon-battling horror franchise, is undiminished, and from the moment Campbell straps on the stump-mounted chainsaw, it's like he's never been away.

He has, of course. It's nearly a quarter of a century since Campbell last played this character on screen, and the writers tackle the inherent absurdity of a 57-year-old action hero head-on. A shot of Ash strapping on a corset in episode one sets the tone: *Ash Vs Evil Dead* must break some sort of record for jabs at its leading man, with digs about dyed hair, dentures and the prostate coming thick and fast. Such a barrage of low blows could take down a lesser man, but Campbell takes it all on that generously-proportioned chin.

That affectionate mockery is just one of many reasons why this uproarious series is such a heap of fun. Another is the quips; as any fan of 1992's *Army Of Darkness* would hope, Ash is always ready with a one-liner, and somehow even the ones which are, by modern standards, unacceptably chauvinist or borderline racist are endearing. This must be the only show on TV where a man nearing pensionable age can sexually proposition a twentysomething waitress and still remain loveable. Ash is a numbskull and a dinosaur, but the fact that he *knows* that somehow acts as a get-out-of-jail card.

When it comes to plot, there isn't a great deal of it, and it's hard to imagine a show this shallow sustaining four or five seasons. After a stoned Ash accidentally

ZOOM IN

DID YOU SPOT? ▲
→ Ash's trip in "Brujo" (1.04) includes flashes of Felix The Cat, *I Dream Of Jeannie*, *Charlie's Angels* and *Flipper*.

BEST EPISODE
→ "Ashes To Ashes" (1.08), in which Ash returns to the cabin in the woods. The production team went through *Evil Dead 2* screengrabbing every detail, and it really pays off.

BEST MOMENT
→ When Ash gets into a punch-up with an evil double grown from his lopped-off hand (1.08). The stuntmen are pretty obvious, but who cares!

TRIVIA
→ Originally Lucy Lawless's character kept Ash's hand inside a cylinder full of liquid, but they dropped that idea because it made the hand look freakishly big.

IT'S WOSSISNAME! ▼
→ Mark Mitchinson (militia leader Crosby in 1.07) was Braga, captain of the Lake-town guard, in the *Hobbit* movies.



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Never open your mouth when blood is flying at you.

unleashes demonic forces again by reading from the Necronomicon to impress a conquest, the series is basically just a mobile bloodbath, with Ash and his cohorts blasting, chopping and, er, meat-slicer-ing their way across the country en route to a fan-pleasuring return to the cabin in the woods where it all began in 1981's *The Evil Dead*. Wherever they go, new people – be they diner patrons, militia men or hikers – are possessed and transformed into murderous Deadites who must be dispatched. Mid-season, the appeal of this formula does start to wane a little, but the sheer brio of the action sequences keeps you entertained.

The violence level is jaw-dropping, with more decapitations than Peter Cushing's filmography and enough impalings to make Vlad Tepes blanche. You wouldn't be surprised if half the budget went on dry cleaning bills, as barely five minutes passes without the cast deluged in fake blood. Unlike 2013's big-screen remake, *Ash Vs Evil Dead* keeps tongue firmly in cheek whenever it's caving in a skull. In Fede Alvarez's movie violence is gritty, painful and traumatising; here it's brightly-coloured, cartoonish splatterstick.

> "Bruce Campbell's twinkly charm sells the show"

Lucy Lawless adds a little intrigue as a mysterious character who's after the book; there's solid support in the shape of Ash's travelling companions Pablo (Ray Santiago) and Kelly (Dana DeLorenzo); and the series isn't afraid to take a few liberties with the lore. But really, its appeal rests squarely on the shoulders of Bruce Campbell. His twinkly charm sells it, and you cannot imagine an *Evil Dead* series working without him. Thanks largely to the fact that Campbell is front and centre, this is a goofy, groovy guilty pleasure. Hail to the king! **Ian Berriman**



He might be 57, but he's still got it.

★ BEST IN SHOW ★

The characters who make TV great



CAROL PELETIER

Melissa McBride's **Walking Dead** warrior

- UK Broadcast **Fox, Mondays from 15 February**
- US Broadcast **AMC, Sundays from 14 February**

Who could have predicted that the mousey, meek and easily dominated woman we first met washing clothes in the quarry back in season one would become the tough-as-nails and utterly ruthless character we know in the sixth? Admittedly, we saw early signs of Carol Peletier having a backbone when she stood up to violent hubby Ed over daughter Sophia, and got a further hint when she angrily mutilated his corpse with a pickaxe after he dies in a Walker attack.

But McBride's Carol has followed a truly satisfying arc on the post-apocalyptic series, making her one of the most interesting characters on TV. And, thanks to her appeal, one of the few surviving cast members from the early episodes.

Since then, we've seen her emerge as a truly hardy woman, the cataclysm seemingly having brought out both the best and, for a time, the very worst in her, with Carol exiled for a season after controversially yet mercifully ending the life of two people during the season four stint at the prison. She's since been allowed back with the others, showing her mettle time and again, and emerging as the toughest baker of cookies currently in zombie TV; though admittedly, there isn't much competition on that front.

McBride infuses her with real charm and spirit and though she has on occasion fallen victim to the silly decision-making process that affects the characters, she's continued to change and adapt. Plus, she has a close bond with Daryl, and their friendship is one of the highlights of the show whenever they share the screen, such as in season five's "Consumed", an intimate, melancholy episode that sees them confronting their issues and their growth so far. Long may she fight! **James White**



The colourful spandex is in the post.

SEASON 3

AGENTS OF SHIELD

Man's inhumanity to Inhumanity

- UK Broadcast **E4, Sundays**
- US Broadcast **ABC, midseason break**
- Episodes Reviewed **3.01-3.10**

The Inhumans are here and *Agents Of SHIELD* is feeling the benefits. The constant complaint during the early days of the show was how un-"super" it felt. Now Coulson and co can't move for people with powers. Even Coulson is a kinda cyborg now; well, he has a prosthetic hand that – in Whedon vernacular – "does stuff". Hell, he undergoes a mutation in episode nine which gives his face the ability to show a third expression (over and above "mild concern" and "smug").

This action-packed half season cracks through a number of parallel, interweaving plot lines with a refreshingly energetic verve. Even when it slows the pace for an extraordinary format-breaking episode five – featuring just one character for much of the running time – the result is assured and gripping.

The main strands are: Daisy forming the Secret Warriors, her own subsection of SHIELD comprising new Inhuman recruits; Coulson discovering the US government has a new Inhuman-hunting division with differing methods to SHIELD's and a boss he fancies almost as much as he mistrusts; a new über-Inhuman called Lash who's killing other Inhumans; May and Andrew having marital problems; Fitz trying to discover where Simmons vanished to; Hunter on a revenge mission against Ward; and Ward discovering that Hydra has indeed grown a new Head. As the season goes on, they all dovetail in often surprising ways.

Fitz wins "character of the half season", narrowly edging out his old partner, Simmons; they both have some meaty plots to chew on. The writers have also worked out what to do with Mack; he's basically Coulson's number two by episode nine and, amazingly for a character who was so forgettable for much of season two, you feel he thoroughly deserves it.

The show still suffers from drab production design, info dump speed bumps and unambitious fight scenes. But at least it now feels like a small-screen version of the bigger Marvel Cinematic Universe, even if Captain America never pops round, never calls, never leaves a text... **Dave Golder**

ZOOM IN

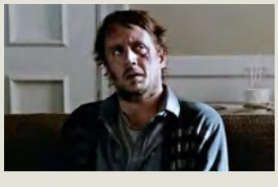
DID YOU SPOT? ▲
→ You can see the axe that Mack used to cut off Coulson's hand in the season two finale hanging on the wall of Coulson's office.

BEST EPISODE
→ "Closure" (3.09) felt more like the midseason finale than the midseason finale did; action, shocks, and several plotlines all coming together.

BEST EPISODE 2
→ "4,722 Hours" (3.05): The spotlight falls on Simmons in an episode that's a one-woman show for the first half. Brave, unusual TV.

BEST MOMENT
→ When Coulson chokes the life out of Ward in the closing moments of the midseason finale (3.10). Brutal.

TRIVIA ▼
→ An Inhuman called Dwight Frye in "Devils You Know" (3.04) is not based on the similarly-named character from Marvel comics (aka Bazooka) but both are a nod to the actor who played Renfield in *Dracula* (1931).



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Looks like the Joker, laughs like the Joker... isn't the Joker.

SEASON 2

GOTHAM

Something's changed in the neighbourhood...

- UK Broadcast **Channel 5, airing now**
- US Broadcast **Fox, returns 29 February**
- Episodes Reviewed **2.01-2.11**

While *Gotham*'s first year favoured a gritty, urban tone, one rooted in the streetwise stylings of such '70s fare as *Taxi Driver* and *Serpico*, the opening half of season two has seen a radical tonal switch. Whisper it in the alleyways but this Bat-prequel finally seems to be having fun with the Dark Knight's world...

Tim Burton's big-screen take feels like a key inspiration here, particularly 1992's *Batman Returns*. These episodes have tapped some of that movie's deliciously macabre vein of black comedy, nowhere more so than in a grisly story arc for proto-Riddler Edward Nygma that's played like the darkest of serial killer farces.

Burton's eye for the theatrical has clearly inspired some of the show's visuals, too, from the stripy Arkham inmates' uniforms to the gargoyles roosting outside Theo Galavan's penthouse lair. And there aren't only echoes of the Burtonverse: the camera frequently tilts into the kind of Dutch angles that gave the '60s show so much of its kooky comic-strip flavour. This is a more heightened, outsized reality, a change symbolised by Barbara's transformation from the dreariest character in season one to the gloriously deranged psycho-ex of season two.

Early episodes revelled in Cameron Monaghan's Jerome, only to reveal he wasn't the Joker-in-waiting after all – brave of the show to play that bait-and-switch, given what a perfect piece of casting he was – and so Galavan, played with relish by James Frain as a lounge lizard demon, has emerged as the key antagonist, the threat who's brought Jim Gordon to his darkest place yet by the end of this "Rise Of The Villains" arc.

It all feels closer in spirit to the comic books – the lore surrounding Gotham's founding families certainly owes a debt to Scott Snyder's recent run – but there's still something missing. Young Bruce may be well on his path to destiny but when Jerome and Barbara stage their deadly magic show in "The Last Laugh" you can't help but crave a caped crusader to come crashing through the skylight... There's still an inescapably Batman-shaped hole in this city. **Nick Setchfield**

ZOOM IN

BEST MOMENT ▲
→ In "The Last Laugh" (2.03) a smear of blood finally gives Jerome the classic rictus smile of the Joker. Who's laughing now?

TRIVIA
→ "Scarification" introduces us to a young, female take on Firefly, the flame-wielding DC villain first seen in *Detective Comics* 184, way back in 1952.

BEST EPISODE
→ "The Last Laugh": *Gotham* plays its Joker as Jerome takes centrestage at a gala. The clever, creepy coda hints the true clown prince of crime is coming...

BEST DIALOGUE
→ Galavan to Tabitha: "If you're feeling upset find a nice librarian to torture. That always cheers you up."

IT'S WOSSISNAME! ▼
→ Yes, that's the unmistakable bonce of Michael Chiklis, here playing new GCPD captain Nathaniel Barnes. You'll know him from *Fantastic Four* and *The Shield*, where he also led a strikeforce...



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LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

THE DOCTOR
"I don't like being sure about things. One minute you're certain, the next everyone turns into lizards and a piano falls on you."
Doctor Who, Christmas Special



ASH
"Shit on a biscuit!"
Ash Vs Evil Dead, Episode 1.10



CAPTAIN YAO
"You look nervous."





JIM
"I get that way when missiles are flying at me."
The Expanse, Episode 1.04

MILO
"You cheated on Kate with two other Kates? Man, you really have a type."
Tripped, Episode 1.03



RIVER SONG
"An archaeologist *is* just a thief. With patience."
Doctor Who, Christmas Special



SCRIPTEASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 3

DA VINCI'S DEMONS

Religious war with a punky twist



- UK Broadcast **Fox UK, finished**
- US Broadcast **Starz, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **3.01-3.10**

The story so far: for two seasons LEONARDO has been part-Renaissance superhero/part Renaissance-era Moffat-style Sherlock who can build super inventions overnight and work stuff out real fast. It's all been jolly hi-jinks and Indiana Jones styles adventure. But now two new threats have arrived: the Ottoman army – who have somehow nicked all the designs for his inventions – and a new showrunner who's convinced everyone that *Da Vinci's Demons* must be a *serious* drama.

LEO
The Ottomans have my tanks. Italy is doomed. Excuse me while I get depressed for half the season.

THE OTTOMANS
Excuse us while we kill both your parents so you can do some *real* angsty acting.

LEO
"To be or not to be... Is this a clockwork dagger I see before me, its on-switch towards my constantly twitching finger?"

ZORASTER (LEO'S BEST MATE)
Excuse me while I act like a blokey, jokey, remnant from the old seasons and kick Leo up the arse for being a navel-gazing show-off. INVENT SOMETHING TO BEAT THE TURKS, YOU DOLT!

Meanwhile in Rome, the false Pope eats babies and kicks puppies while a new religious cult, the Labyrinth – under the guidance of the Architect – brainwashes Riario.

RIARIO
Mumble, mumble, mumble.

THE ARCHITECT
You were nearly heroic last season so we'll scramble your brain so you can be randomly evil all over again.

RIARIO
Mumble, mumble, mumble.

THE ARCHITECT
Yes, you carry on mumbling while I try to work out if all this stuff about "Labyrinth" and "Architect" is a bizarre *Matrix* reference.

Meanwhile in the writers' room...

NEW SHOWRUNNER
Good drama is all about family. Everyone must have a mummy and/or daddy issue. Even the mummies and daddies! Except Lorenzo. He can be captured and tortured again. Because torture porn is good drama too. In fact, torture EVERYONE!

OTHER WRITERS
Isn't this all getting a bit samey?

NEW SHOWRUNNER
Hmmm, maybe. You know what we really need? The return of Vlad the Impaler!

OTHER WRITERS
Isn't he one of the cheesy, silly elements from season one we're trying to get away from?

NEW SHOWRUNNER
Maybe we can give him family issues?

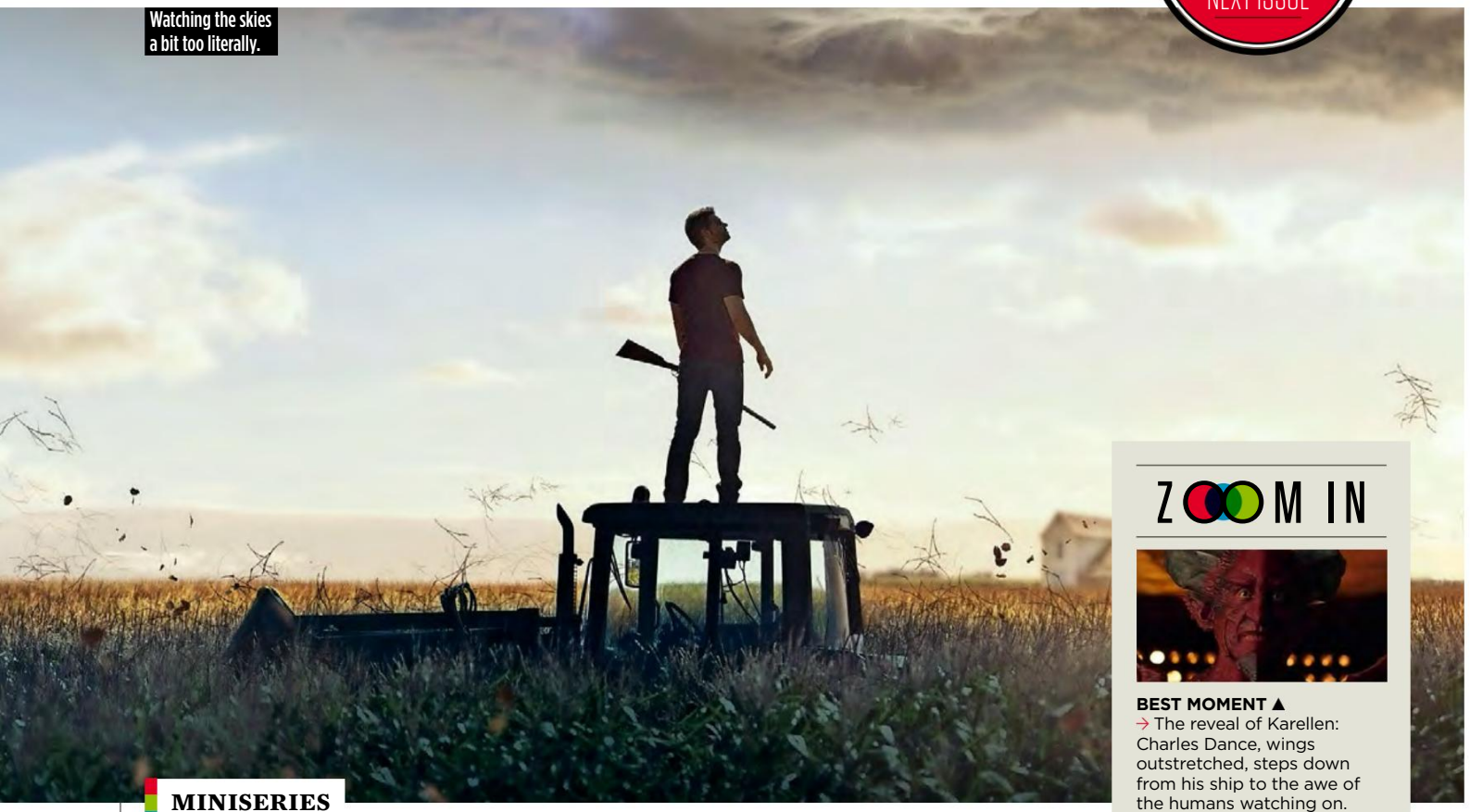
OTHER WRITERS
This needs to end... NOW!

Back in the plot, Leo gets it together and defeats the Ottoman empire with a lightning machine.

THE END

Dave Golder

SPURIOUS AWARDS WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE



Watching the skies a bit too literally.

MINISERIES

CHILDHOOD'S END

A Clarke adaptation with sympathy for the devil

- UK Broadcast **TBC**
- US Broadcast **Syfy, finished**
- Episodes Reviewed **1.01-1.03**

***Childhood's End* has been** chained up in development hell for decades. Arthur C Clarke's classic alien invasion novel has long been considered for adaptation, but its complex story, vast scale and sprawling cast were surely a stumbling block. Well now they've only gone and done it (they being US Syfy, *Life On Mars* co-creator Matthew Graham and movie producer Akiva Goldsman) and it's not half-bad.

We begin with a whacking great spaceship turning up and hovering over the Earth. The twist here is that the Overlords, as they are quickly dubbed, appear to come in peace. They end poverty, hunger and crime, and soon humanity is prospering under the benevolent gaze of Supervisor for Earth, Karellen – a gravelly-voiced, initially unseen Charles Dance.

Dance carries the weight of his many villainous roles here. When Karellen is revealed to look like the devil, it's a powerful moment but not a huge surprise – you anticipate him being evil. And yet, as the story progresses, your sympathies increasingly lie with him. The Overlords are clearly up to something dodgy (and the story has a famously bleak ending) but the alternatives embodied by Colm Meaney's newspaper editor Wainwright are nihilistic and reactionary. Dance is the most interesting thing here and symbolic of the show's strengths.

There are grumbles. One major character is written out off screen – if you're not paying attention to a background newscast you'll have no idea where he's gone! Pacing is also an issue. At 90 minutes each, the three episodes feel padded, despite the scope of the story. Perhaps that would have been less noticeable if it had been split into six shorter chapters. Clarke diehards will also no doubt find some of the alterations to the source material a little egregious – Ricky Stormgren is now an all-American everyman, rather than the Secretary General of the UN, for instance.

It's a brave and satisfying attempt, though, to capture the spirit of the novel in all its epic, terrifying glory. That it mostly succeeds is quite the feat. More like this, please, Syfy. **Will Salmon**

ZOOM IN

BEST MOMENT ▲
→ The reveal of Karellen: Charles Dance, wings outstretched, steps down from his ship to the awe of the humans watching on.

EASTER EGG
→ The musical choices that the Stormgren family listen to on the radio are all from the '50s – a nod to the novel's original publication date.

BEST EPISODE
→ "The Overlords" (1.01) is impressively widescreen, quickly conveying the scale of this strange invasion. It's pacier than the rather saggy middle and end chapters.

TRIVIA
→ Stanley Kubrick was initially interested in adapting *Childhood's End*. Though that project was abandoned, it was the starting point for his collaboration with Clarke on *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

IT'S WOSSISNAME! ▼
→ There's a *Life On Mars* connection in the cast – Colm Meaney was Gene Hunt in the US remake's unaired pilot.



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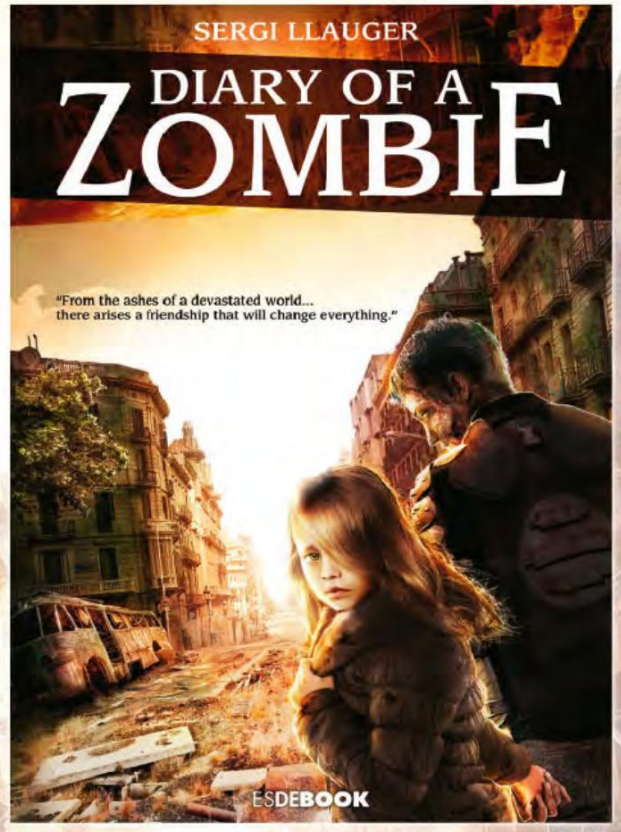
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Quizmaster: **Ian Berriman, Reviews Editor**

QUESTION 1

Which *Doctor Who* story was named after a lithograph by MC Escher?

QUESTION 2 PICTURE QUESTION

Which artist painted this movie poster?



QUESTION 3

According to *Men In Black 3*, which artist was actually an MIB codenamed Agent W?

QUESTION 4

Name the 1973 film in which an artist kills those who've wronged him using voodoo paintings.

QUESTION 5

Which anthology series opened every episode with an introduction set in an art gallery?

QUESTION 6

Which TV series featured an artist called Isaac Mendez?

QUESTION 7 PICTURE QUESTION

Name this Renaissance painter (played here by Tom Riley).



QUESTION 8

Which *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode features a collector who owns the "Mona Lisa", Van Gogh's "Starry Night" and Salvador Dali's "The Persistence Of Memory"?

QUESTION 9

Which infamous oil painting was the work of a character called Basil Hallward?

QUESTION 10

Complete this line from *Guardians Of The Galaxy*: "If I had a black light, this room would look like a ---------- painting".



QUESTION 11

The *Doctor Who* story "City Of Death" centres on a plot to steal which famous painting?

QUESTION 12 PICTURE QUESTION

In which film does this sinister painting appear?

QUESTION 13

In *Batman* (1989) the Joker and his goons vandalise various famous paintings in an art gallery – but he spares one he likes. Who's the artist?



QUESTION 14

Name the Swiss artist who provided concept designs for *Alien*.

QUESTION 15

Which David Cronenberg film features a sculptor called Benjamin Pierce?



QUESTION 16 PICTURE QUESTION

What's the name of this painting? Full title, please!

QUESTION 17

Which TV series has an episode called "Provenance", all about a haunted painting?

QUESTION 18

Complete the name of this *Star Wars* concept artist: Ralph --------.

QUESTION 19

In which 1965 horror film is an art critic menaced by a dead painter's disembodied hand?

QUESTION 20

Who played Van Gogh in *Doctor Who*'s "Vincent And The Doctor"?

Answers

1 "Castrovalva" 2 Drew Struzan 3 Andy Warhol 4 *The Vault Of Horror* 5 *Night Gallery* 6 Heroes 7 Leonardo da Vinci (in *Da Vinci's Demons*) 8 "The Most Toys" 9 *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* 10 Jackson Pollock 11 The "Mona Lisa" 12 *Ghostbusters 2* 13 Francis Bacon 14 HR Giger 15 *Scanners* 16 "Gallifrey Falls No More" 17 *Supernatural* 18 McQuarrie 19 *Dr Terror's House Of Horrors* 20 Tony Curran

How did you do?

Turner Prize winner or finger painting?


→ **0-5** Potato print


→ **6-10** Crayon doodle


→ **11-15** Pencil sketch


→ **16-19** Watercolour landscape


→ **20** Portrait in oils

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



© GETTY

ROD SERLING

Nick Setchfield, Features Editor

He had the look of a salesman or a real estate agent or the kind of Madison Avenue dream merchant who would one day be immortalised in *Mad Men*: natty black suit and tie, slick, military-neat hair, an eternally smouldering cigarette. But Rod Serling sold fantasies far wilder than the chrome and Tupperware dreams of post-war America. His real estate was the fifth dimension, "a land of both shadows and substance, things and ideas." Next stop: *The Twilight Zone*...

As creator and curator of this twist-packed anthology series Serling would haunt the edges of his stories like a benign spectre. His two-tone wardrobe was perfect for black and white screens while that ever present curl of smoke from a lit Chesterfield drifted like ectoplasm across the airwaves. This was his realm: the Twilight Zone, with its infinite storytelling possibilities, was really the nascent medium of TV itself, its "shadows and substance" the grain and fuzz of those early grey images. Topping and tailing each weekly episode he broke the flickering fourth wall and addressed his audience directly. He had plenty to say.

Serling came to the *Zone* with a strong reputation as a firebrand dramatist, a passionate, provocative voice committed to tackling such topics as war, racism and social injustice. Known for brawling with networks over questions of censorship he claimed, at first, that this little science fiction show was a retreat. "I don't want to fight anymore," he stated, seemingly sick of clashing with an industry that prized the whims of its advertisers over crusaders with typewriters.



But Serling also said, "I have never written beneath myself" and *The Twilight Zone*, for all its mysterioso trappings, became a stealth expression of the outsized heart beneath that black suit. Episodes explored racial prejudice, the instinctive fear of the outsider, the weaponised madness of mankind, the heartbreaking lure of nostalgia (driven by Serling's own "desperate hunger to go back where it all began"). Still resonant, still relevant, these stories endure, too full of soul and humanity to ever be monochrome museum pieces.

"That's the marvellous phenomenon of television," Serling observed, over half a century ago. "It lends immortality to almost everything."

Nick longs to see a gremlin on a plane's wing at 20,000ft.

Fact Attack!

→ **Serling wrote the script for *Planet Of The Apes*. Think of that classic Statue of Liberty reveal as the greatest *Twilight Zone* twist there never was.**

→ **Serling returned to TV with another anthology show, *Night Gallery* (out now on DVD). Between 1970 and 1973, it told occult-flavoured stories.**

→ **Serling's fame was such that he appeared in TV commercials, fronting campaigns for Ford, Radio Shack and Gulf Oil.**

→ **The *Twilight Zone* episode "A World Of His Own" revealed that Serling himself was simply the creation of playwright Gregory West.**

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2 MARCH
DETAILS ON PAGE 29

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